THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT

IN THE

BLACK COUNTRY 1863-1914

ERIC TAYLOR

A thesis submitted in the University of Keele for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The Black Country was, and remains, an area characterised by insular and conservative social attitudes. These charactersistics were already strongly evident by the 1860s and thereafter were intensified by the collapse of the area's prosperity consequent on the rapid decline of its two basic industries, coal mining and iron manufacture, and the transformation of its traditional metal using trades by the widespread application of machine methods. The divisive consequences of industrial decline, depressed living standards and social stagnation for working class organisation were compounded by the extreme local particularism of its sub-regions, deriving in the main from an intense localisation of industry. Within this context the progress of the working class movement in the area was uncertain and slow.

The first large group of workers to organise were the ironworkers, in the spring of 1863. At this time the impetus to organisation given by a sharp upturn of trade in a strongly cyclical industry proved strong enough to overcome the obstacles inherent in the structure of the industry, and the Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain

was formed. The union survived for only five years, but the conflicts which arose with the rival association of the northern ironworkers, the National Association of Ironworkers, during this short time left a legacy of suspicion and hostility between the two groups of ironworkers which long outlasted the two unions.

The National Association of Ironworkers narrowly survived the depression of 1867-8 which brought the collapse of the Associated Ironworkers and was re-formed as the National Amalgamated Association of Ironworkers. When the first onset of the great coal and iron boom in 1869-70 brought no recovery of unionism in the Black Country the National Amalgamated Association took the initiative in organising the area and in 1872 its status as the national association for ironworkers was recognised by the Black Country men. Despite the spectacular success of the National Amalgamated Association in the Black Country during the early 1870s the tensions between the south Staffordshire ironworkers and those in the north of England persisted and were again clearly revealed when the dramatic collapse of the iron and coal boom effectively destroyed union organisation in the Black Country.

The conciliation movement which had accompanied the rise of the National Amalgamated Association in the Black Country survived the collapse of unionism. The ad hoc South Staffordshire Iron Trade Board which had been established in 1872 broke up in 1875 but was quickly

reformed and placed on a firmer institutional basis as the South Staffordshire Mill and Forge Wages Board. Over the next decade leadership of the local ironworkers was exercised by this board, and with its influence in favour of conciliation being strongly reinforced by the continuing shrinkage of the south Staffordshire iron trade the adjustment to decline was made without undue difficulty.

The success of the wages board largely obscured the weakness of organisation on the men's side, but intensified pressure on wages consequent on a further marked down turn in trade in the mid 1880s brought into sharp focus the importance of complementing conciliation machinery with effective union organisation and the Black Country ironworkers took a leading part in re-forming the National Amalgamated Association of Ironworkers as the Associated Iron and Steel Workers of Great Britain during 1887. The return of union organisation to the south Staffordshire iron trade in turn prompted calls for re-organisation of the wages board and in the following year this was successfully carried through, the change being marked by re-naming the board the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board.

The question of the relationship between the union and the men's representatives on the wages board was resolved at an early stage, and over the next two decades union and board combined to preserve as much as possible of the declining south Staffordshire trade. During this time the position of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers as

the strongest union in the iron and steel trade was increasingly challenged by the rise of the British Steel Smelters Association, committed to replacing the sub-contract system by direct labour. This development had particularly important implications for the south Staffordshire iron industry, which was organised entirely on a sub-contract basis and while there was no direct challenge to the Associated Iron and Steel Workers in the Black Country the possible consequences of an inter-union clash for the fragile prosperity of the area's industry were dramatically demonstrated at Hawarden Bridge in 1909-11. Thereafter such resistance as remained among Black Country ironworkers to the idea of rationalising the industry's fragmented union structure crumbled rapidly and they offered no resistance to the process of union consolidation which culminated in the formation of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation in 1917.

The formation of district associations by Black Country miners followed directly from the establishment and initial success of the Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain, and the area was strongly represented at the Leeds conference of November 1863 at which the Miners' National Association was formed. When the National Association failed to support them during a long strike in 1864 the Black Country men rebelled against Alexander Macdonald's leadership and took a leading part in forming the breakaway Practical Miners' Association. This organisation collapsed within two years,

but doubts about the value of alliances with miners of other areas persisted and were an important factor in shaping the attitudes of Black Country miners for the next half century.

These doubts were temporarily overcome during the great boom of the early 1870s. The revival of organisation in the north-east sector of the coalfield was led by the Amalgamated Association of Miners, formed in 1869, and during 1873 the associations of the south-west sector re-affiliated to the National Association. With the collapse of union organisation at the end of the boom doubts revived. Only two Black Country associations affiliated to the Miners' National Union, formed in 1875 from what remained of the National and the Amalgamated, and by 1878 both had seceded.

By this time a second important characteristic of Black Country miners' organisations, namely marked differences of "temper" between the associations in the north-east and south-west sectors of the coalfield, was becoming increasingly evident. This difference had first become apparent during the great boom when the associations of the south-west sector had acted as pace-setters in the drive for improved wages and shorter hours, but had been largely obscured at that time by the dramatic success of unionism and the wages movement.

The collapse of prosperity in 1874 was followed by a long strike as the miners resisted the owners' attempt to

impose a wage reduction, and when this ended with the establishment of a sliding scale of wages the difference in temper between the miners' associations of the south-west and north-east sectors were clearly revealed in attitudes to the scale.

The difference intensified through the 1880s. Even the necessity of making common cause against the owners during the long strike of 1884 failed to bring any lasting reconciliation, and by 1890 the rise of a powerful national organisation, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, and changes in the structure of local unionism had produced a situation where Black Country miners were divided into two hostile camps. The miners in the central districts of the coalfield accepted the authority of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Coal Trade Wages Board while two militant enclaves to north and south were affiliated to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. Hostility between the two camps made the 1890s a particularly difficult decade for mining trade unionism in the Black Country, but the growing influence of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain progressively undermined the authority of the wages board until in 1899 the miners of the central districts affiliated and the wages board was reconstituted as a board of conciliation.

Resolution of the local position in relation to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain did not, however, eradicate the long standing difference of temper between

rival local associations. These persisted to 1914 and beyond and were clearly revealed in differing densities of union membership, differing attitudes to the question of employers' liability and in the different levels at which demands were pitched during the strike for the individual district minimum wage in 1912.

The craftsmen of the Black Country were slower to organise than the ironworkers and the miners. The flint-glass makers and flint-glass cutters had established strong unions during the 1840s and 1850s, but in the metal using trades no lasting association of workers was formed until 1870 when the nut and bolt workers established a union. This achieved some success during the 1870s, but thereafter its position was progressively undermined as technological change eroded the craft basis of the nut and bolt industry. With other Black Country trades undergoing a similar transformation, in 1886 the Midland Counties Trades Federation was formed to encourage organisation among craft workers, to establish a basis for mutual support and to press for protective legislation. The Federation had considerable initial success and membership reached 20,000 in 1900, but its conservative leadership never came to terms with a rapidly changing industrial situation and through the first decade of the twentieth century membership and authority steadily declined. The fortunes of particular unions in the main anticipated or reflected those of the Federation, but there were two

notable exceptions. Hollow-ware manufacture and chain-making remained craft based industries until 1914 and strong unions of craft workers were established in these trades.

The process of technological change which brought about the decline of craft unionism was also the main factor in the dramatic "explosion" of the general unions in the Black Country in 1913. Signs of unrest among workers left unprotected against the intensification of work consequent on mechanisation became evident during 1911 and these culminated in a long and profoundly bitter strike in the late spring and summer of 1913. Large sections of industry were virtually paralysed by the dispute, which was only resolved by the direct intervention of the Board of Trade. The central objective of the strike, establishment of a minimum wage, was achieved and it laid the foundations of effective union organisation in the metal using trades of the Black Country.

The late development of a strong basis of trade unionism in the Black Country reflected the vitiation of industrial change in the area, and in turn these were important influences retarding the rise of an independent political labour movement. In the early 1860s the political affiliation of such "superior" working men as had the vote was strongly Liberal, and this was a main factor in the strength of the Liberal Party in the area. The incomplete nature of the 1867 Reform Act, which in

the main enfranchised working men similar in economic status and political attitude to those already having the vote, further strengthened the position of the Liberal Party, to the point where it was beyond challenge by the Conservatives, and from 1857 to 1880 no Conservative M.P. was returned in any of the Black Country boroughs.

This situation was transformed by the far-reaching effects of the 1884 Franchise Act and the Liberal Party's adoption of Home Rule for Ireland as official policy. The Franchise Act gave the vote to a type of working man whose status and outlook rendered him more susceptible to the pragmatic appeal of the post-1867 Conservative Party. The Liberal Party's decision to pursue Home Rule for Ireland alienated many of its traditional supporters among the superior working men, and between these two factors the formerly impregnable position of the Liberal Party was destroyed. Following the general election of 1886 only four out of nine Black Country divisions remained in Liberal hands.

The social conservatism of the area and the weakness of commitment to collectivist ideals among its working menmeant that the "socialist boom" which followed the foundation of the Independent Labour Party in 1893 left the Black Country largely untouched. Similarly, the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 evoked little initial response, but during 1902 and 1903 attempts were made to promote independent labour candidacies

in three constituencies. In Wednesbury and Worcestershire North these foundered on the reluctance of working class leaders to abandon their established allegiance to Liberalism, but in Wolverhampton West a Labour Representation Committee candidate was adopted and following the conclusion of a controversial electoral alliance with the local Liberals he was narrowly elected in 1906. Liberal candidates were elected in seven of the remaining eight Black Country divisions, but the revival of Liberalism proved short lived. A strong Conservative counter attack based on the cry of tariff reform was pressed home vigorously and at the general elections of 1910 seven constituencies, Wolverhampton West among them, reverted to Conservative hands.

In 1914, despite some important gains in the half century since 1863, the working class movement in the Black Country remained weak. Despite the dramatic events of the previous year there was still little basis of effective trade union organisation in many sectors of industry, and all the parliamentary seats in the area were held by one or other of the two great parties. One incidental result of this weakness is that the historiography of the working class movement in the Black Country is incomplete and unsatisfactory.

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PART ONE

C H A P T E R O N E

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE BLACK COUNTRY 1860 - 1914

The Black Country. Delineation of the Black Country of south Staffordshire and north Worcestershire has been attempted by a number of authorities. Some consider the boundary of the area to coincide with the limit of the outcrop of the Middle Coal Measures. For others the extent of the Black Country is related to the distribution of heavy industry. J.B. Jukes, for example, writing in 1858, used the iron industry as an index to define the area as a parallelogram ten miles long from north north east to north south west and five miles wide from east to west, enclosed by lines drawn between Stourbridge, Halesowen, Walsall, Bloxwich, Wolverhampton and Stourbridge.[1] Ten years later Elihu Burritt defined the Black Country impressionistically as 'a nebula of coal and iron towns, making one great cloud of industrial communities,' between Wolverhampton and Birmingham.[2] Much more recently S.H. Beaver has classified the essential characteristics of the cultural landscape and used these to define the periphery of the Black Country in terms of a line drawn from Bloxwich through Willenhall and Wednesfield to Wolverhampton, then curving east of Sedgley to Stourbridge, then east to the outskirts of Halesowen, and north north east through Oldbury and West Bromwich and back to Walsall.[3]

All these are useful criteria, but none is in itself sufficient, and all of them together do not give a true picture of the area. In addition to its heavy industry and the common ingredients of the landscape resulting from the uncontrolled industrial development of a century and more ago, the Black Country is bound together also by 'a complex series of social factors,' and in any consideration of the area as a unit these factors must be given special consideration.[4]

These factors derive essentially from the slow breakdown of the area's physical isolation. Until the intensive exploitation of its coalfield began south Staffordshire was one of the more remote parts of the isolated Birmingham district. The industrial growth consequent on exploitation of the coalfield brought a massive influx of population and a rapid spread of settlements in a socially undeveloped area. Communications were generally poor and the concentration of interest on mining and iron manufacture, to the almost oomplete exclusion of social provision of any kind, resulted in the inhabitants, 'consistently employed in mining and in blackening manufactures, united but little with society beyond their own narrow circuits,' acquiring or preserving 'a peculiarity of manner, habit and language.'[5]

This 'peculiarity' deriving from long isolation persists in some degree to this day. The Black Country dialect, containing many words and phrases which would

have been familiar to Chaucer, is still widely spoken, especially by the older generation. There is a coarse, and often fatalistic, Black Country humour. Local customs and traditions die hard, and many Black Countrymen still exhibit a profound suspicion of strangers, and of change. These characteristics are progressively breaking down under the influence of the mass media, but 'regional consciousness' remains well developed, and has a wider distribution than is indicated by definition of the Black Country in terms of the distribution of heavy industry or its legacy of derelict land.

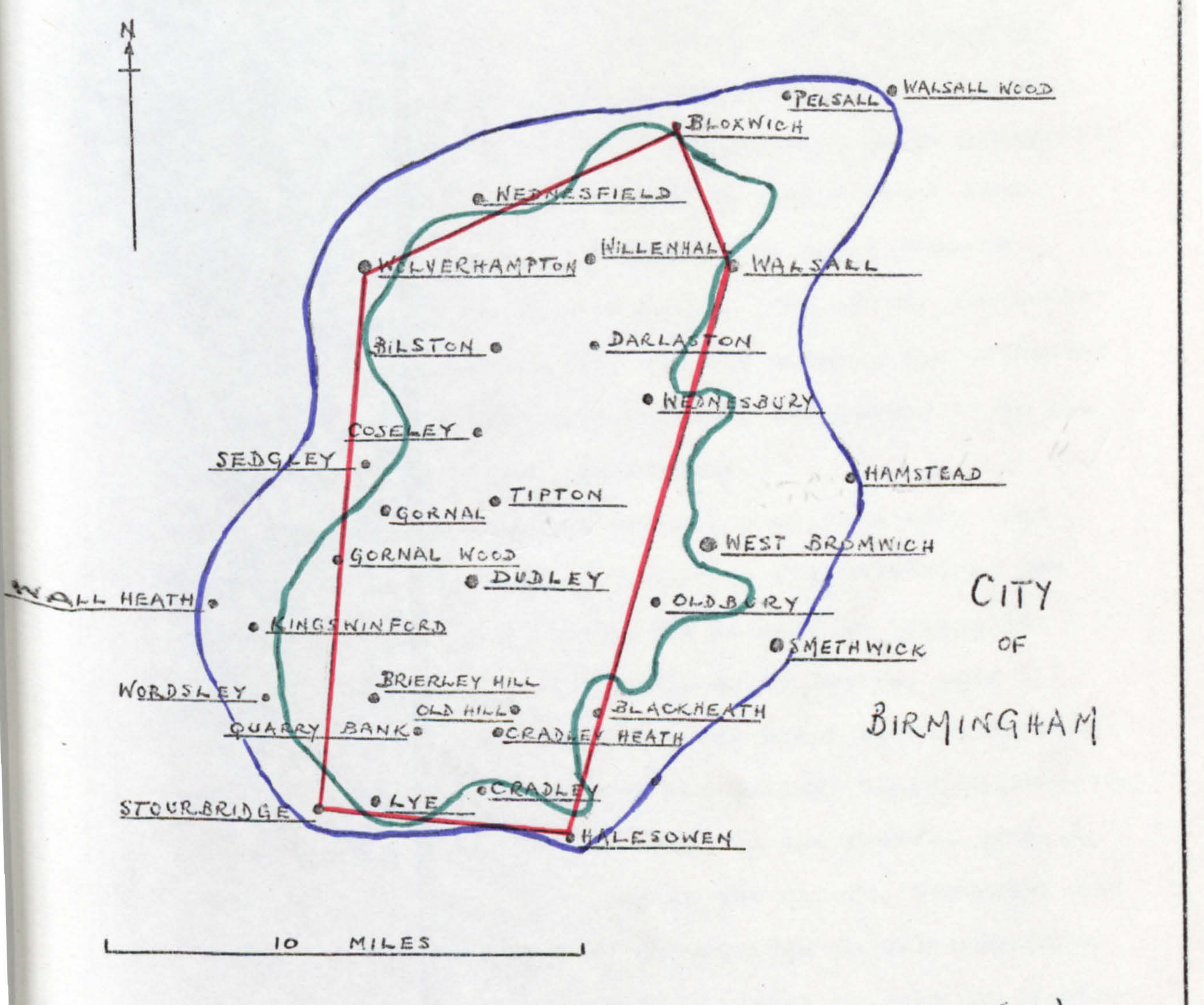
Thus, the definitions of both Jukes and Beaver exclude Sedgley, Halesowen, Smethwick, and much of Wolverhampton and West Bromwich from the area of the Black Country. In the precise terms of the narrow industrial criteria employed this may be justified, but these towns clearly share many of the social characteristics of those places more central to the area such as Dudley and Wednesbury. In addition, while towns like Sedgley and Smethwick are located beyond the limits of the exposed coalfield, and may not have had any considerable share in the iron industry their economic fortunes, certainly in the period to 1914, were closely bound up with iron and coal in a way that those of surrounding areas - Birmingham to the east, Cannock Chase to the north and the rural areas to the south and west - were not.

A rather wider definition of the Black Country than is given by any of the authorities so far cited is thus required, and for the purposes of this study the area will be considered as that which is at present administered by the county boroughs of Wolverhampton, Walsall, West Bromwich, Dudley and Warley, and the non-county boroughs of Halesowen and Stourbridge. This definition clearly sets the Black Country apart from Birmingham, Cannock and its rural southern and western environs, while overcoming the difficulties arising from demarcation in narrow industrial terms by emphasising the wider distribution of those social characteristics peculiar to the area. (See Map 1).

Within this area of about one hundred square miles there may be identified a number of sub-regions, smaller areas with peculiarities of their own. The most important sub-division, 'whether on relief, geological, historical or purely social grounds', is that into south-western and north-eastern sectors, separated by the higher central ridge running from Sedgley to Rowley.[6] These two sectors exhibit marked differences of relief. The north-eastern sector, drained by the upper Tame is generally much flatter and more monotonous in character than the south-western sector, where a more complex geological structure and the incision of the Stour and its tributaries has produced a more highly accidented landscape.

MAP ONE

THE BLACK COUNTRY



BOUNDARY OF THE BLACK COUNTRY AS DEFINED BY JUKES (1858) ——

BEAVER (1947) ——

TAYLOR (1993) ——

This contrasting relief had important consequences for the development of transport. The flatter terrain of the north-eastern sector made canal construction much easier and the canal network was developed earlier and more extensively here than in the south-western sector. At the same time existence of the central ridge presented a formidable barrier to construction of a canal link between the two sectors, and only two canal tunnels through the ridge were ever built. The first, the Dudley Tunnel, was opened in 1792, but the second, the Netherton Tunnel, was completed only in 1858, and proved to be the last canal tunnel built in England.[7]

Railway construction tells a similar story. The earliest main line railway in south Staffordshire, the Grand Junction, was constructed in 1837 to follow the valley of the Tame from Birmingham to Bescot, near Walsall, and in the 1840s both the Great Western Railway and the London and North Western Railway built their lines from Birmingham to Wolverhampton on the eastern side of the central ridge. The line of the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway from Stourbridge to Wolverhampton, involving the construction of a tunnel through the central ridge at Dudley, was not completed until 1854, while the link between Birmingham and Stourbridge, across the difficult terrain of the south-western sector, was only finished in 1867. The physical isolation of the north-eastern sector was thus broken down earlier than that of

the south-western sector, while the central ridge constituted a considerable obstacle to internal communication between the two parts of the region. This difference of relief and its consequences, together with their differing aspects, had important consequences for the differing economic and industrial evolution of the two sectors, and this in turn accounts for some important social differences between them.

In addition, within these two major sub-regions even smaller areas of distinct regional consciousness may be identified, deriving initially from an intense industrial specialisation. These are fading now, as are the unique distinguishing characteristics of the wider Black Country area, but enough still remains of the distinctive character of a century ago to distinguish between Willenhall, whose unity centred originally on localisation of the lock trade, and Darlaston, the centre of nut and bolt manufacture. In the south-western sector Cradley Heath, as the former centre of the chainmaking trade, still retains its own individuality quite different from that of Lye, with its concentration on hollow-ware. Each of these towns, and many others, formerly had a distinct identity, in some cases reinforced by long standing feuds and rivalries, and something of this still lingers. At the same time in the derivation of their staple trades from the great extractive industries of south Staffordshire and north Worcestershire, and in their

sharing of many social characteristics they clearly form part of the distinctive wider region which is the Black Country.

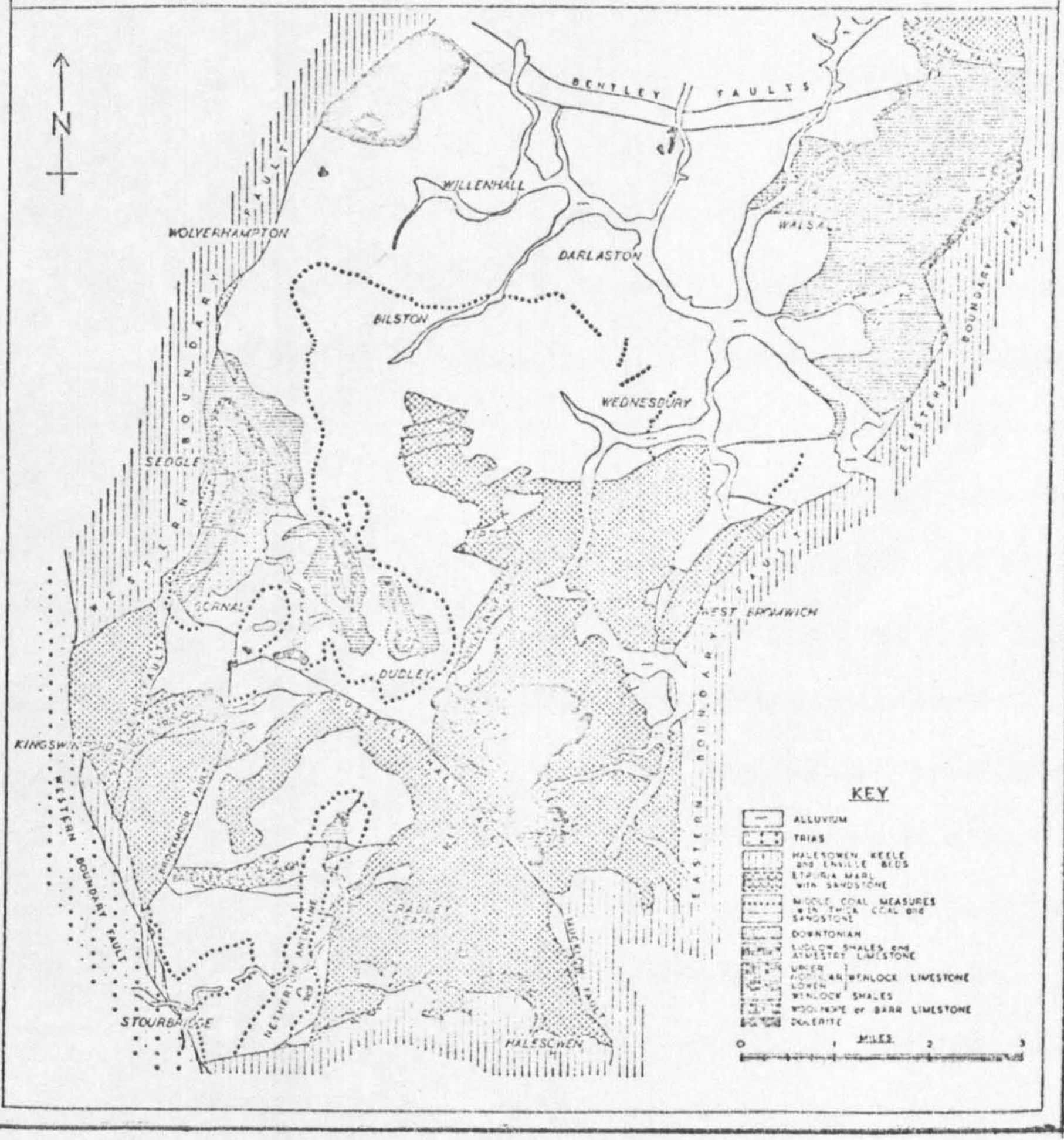
Economic Change. In 1858 it was written of the Black Country that 'there is hardly perhaps to be found anywhere in the world another space ----- of so peculiar a character.'[8] This special character derived from the intensive exploitation of the great mineral wealth of the geologically unique south Staffordshire plateau, and in particular the 'thick' or 'ten yard' coal seam. By 1860 coal was being drawn from almost every part of south Staffordshire and north Worcestershire which lay on the exposed coal measures to the south of the Bentley fault which marks the northern limit of the Black Country coalfield, and coal had already been found under the red rocks bordering the eastern edge of the exposed field. This coalfield could be divided into three sections. The first of these was south of a line drawn from West Bromwich through Tipton to the western boundary fault near Sedgley. This line corresponds roughly to the Sedgley - Rowley ridge. North of this lay the middle part of the field, with a northern boundary running from West Bromwich through Wednesbury and skirting the southern edge of Wolverhampton. Beyond this section was the third division, bounded by a line joining Rushall, Bloxwich and the western boundary fault at Wednesfield Heath.[9]

Within each of those districts were found a number of thin seams of brooch coal, heathen coal, new-mine coal, fire-clay coal and bottom coal, but the area's prosperity had been founded essentially on the unique and magnificent thick coal seam. This had been formed by the coalescence of thirteen or fourteen seams, and ranged in thickness between 24 and 42 feet. It outcropped over wide areas of the two southern sectors of the coalfield. To the south-west of the central ridge it curved westward from Brierley Hill through Pensnett and Gornal, and outcropped in a great loop round Lye, Netherton and Old Hill. North-east of the ridge the thick coal ran in a wide arc from Dudley through Tipton and Coseley to Bilston and then south-east to Wednesbury. (See Map 2) Coal from the thin seams varied in quality and was used mainly for coking, for manufacturing purposes or for domestic consumption. The thick coal was generally of a very high grade and was extensively employed uncoked in blast furnaces, and for 'the most delicate manufactures of the Midland counties, from the annealing of a needle to the welding of a gun barrel.'[10.]

The middle part of the field, to the north-east of the central ridge, had been developed first and a large number of small mines sunk. Signs of exhaustion and flooding had become apparent well before 1850 and consequently mining activity had then developed rapidly in other parts of the coalfield. This involved the sinking

MAP TWO

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COALFIELD
SOLID GEOLOGY



of mines in the northern section, between Walsall and Wolverhampton, where only the thin seams occurred, and in the West Bromwich and Oldbury districts, until by 1860 there were more than 300 collieries in the north-east sector of the Black Country. In the south-west sector the more highly accidented geological structure made mining conditions more difficult and this part of the coalfield had been developed later, so that by 1860 there were only about 115 collieries in this sector.[11]

The total output of the south Staffordshire and North Worcestershire coalfield in 1860 was 5,100,000 tons. This represented a considerable fall on the figure of 6,010,500 tons raised in 1856, and reflected the exhaustion of the more accessible seams and increasing difficulties of drainage in the Black Country section of the field. Production recovered through the 1860s to reach a peak of 10,550,000 tons at the height of the great coal and iron boom in 1872, but the portents were unmistakable.[12] In 1865 50,000,000 gallons of water were being raised from the coal mines of South Staffordshire and North Worcestershire in every twenty four hour period, and the South Staffordshire Mines Drainage Act of 1873 established commissions with powers to organise and co-ordinate pumping activities.

By this time a shift was taking place in the relative importance of the north-east and south-west sectors of the Black Country coalfield. In consequence of its later

development mining in the south-west sector was still expanding in the early 1870s, and both the number and depth of mines was increasing, while in the north-east sector the pace of decline accelerated. Even the opening of two large deep collieries, at Sandwell Park in 1873 and at Hamstead in 1875, in which the thick coal was met at 1200 feet and 1800 feet respectively, could not compensate for the increasing number of pit closures in the north-east sector.

By the turn of the century the shift was complete and the south-west sector clearly dominated. In the early years of the twentieth century there were a number of collieries employing up to 250 workers in the triangle having Netherton, Lye and Halesowen at its corners. In the Pelsall, Kingswinford and Gornal districts were other collieries, each employing up to 100 men, and some large workings near Himley employed about 700. In addition a number of very small pits, each employing a few dozen colliers, were scattered throughout the sector. By contrast, in the north-east sector the only two collieries of any size and profitability were Sandwell Park and Hamstead on the eastern edge, and a few in the central part of the area employing between 100 and 250 men each. As in the south-west sector there was a scattering of small pits across the sector, employing less than 50 men each.[13] During the years between 1900 and 1914 the dominance of the south-west sector was further accentuated

by the opening of Baggeridge Wood Colliery, near Sedgley, in 1910, and the continuing decline of the north-east sector. (The distribution of mining activity in the Black County in 1861 and 1902 is shown on Map 3).

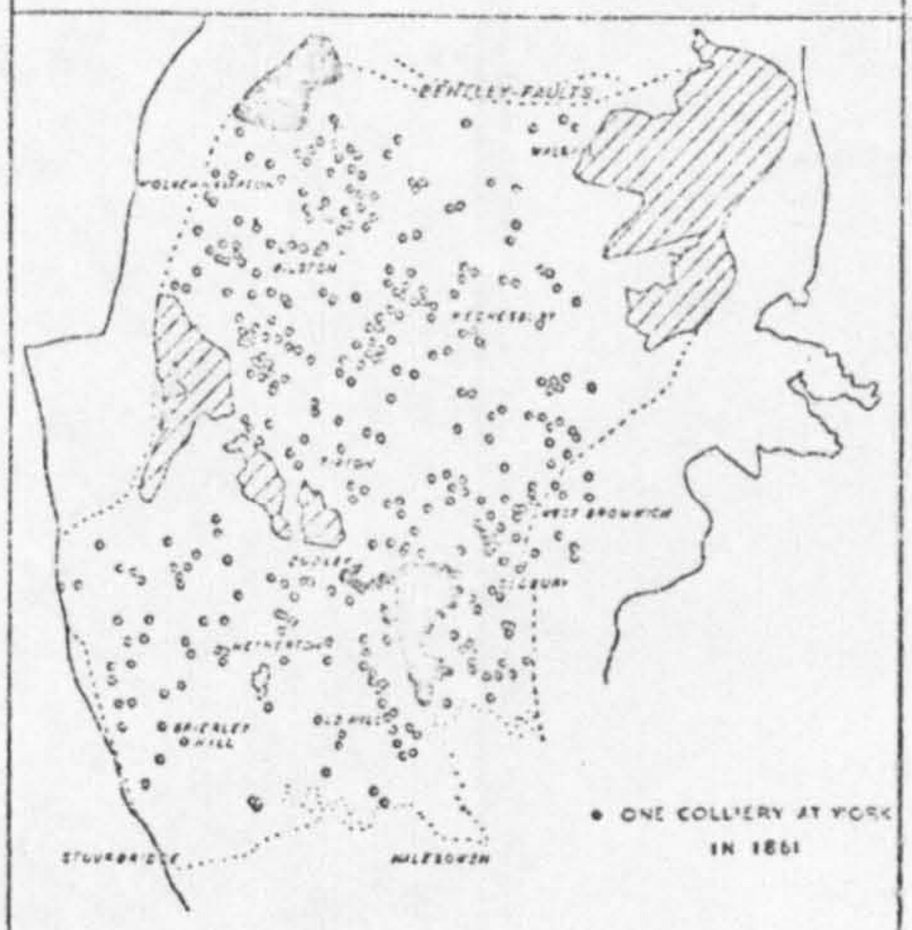
These developments took place against a background of accelerating decline over the coalfield as a whole. Following the collapse of the great boom in 1874 output declined rapidly as the effects of exhaustion and flooding were compounded by the consequences of decline in the iron industry, and increasingly severe competition from Cannock and other coalfields. By 1886 annual output from the mines of the Black County had fallen to about 6,000,000 tons and between that year and 1913 production declined by one-half, to around 3,000,000 tons.[14]

Other types of mining declined in the same way as coal mining. In 1860 the annual output of ironstone from the mines of the Black Country was 786,000 tons - almost 10% of total British production. This figure had fallen dramatically to 51,000 tons by the end of the nineteenth century, and between 1910 and 1913 production of ironstone averaged only 30,000 tons per year.[15] Limestone mining was similarly in continual decline from the middle years of the nineteenth century. Between 1864 and 1875 annual production of limestone averaged about 300,000 tons. In 1897 output was rather less than 100,000 tons, from only seven mines, and by 1913 nearly all the limestone being used in the Black Country was imported from North Staffordshire.[16] Of the extractive industries on which

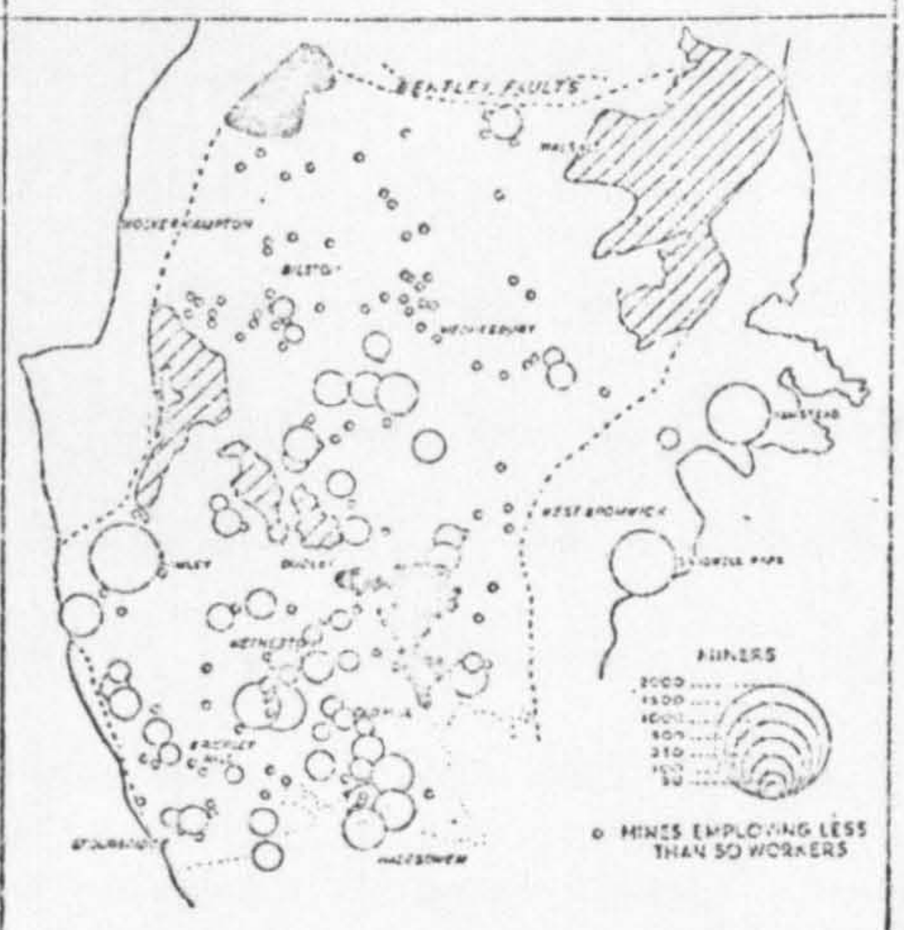
MAP THREE

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COALFIELD

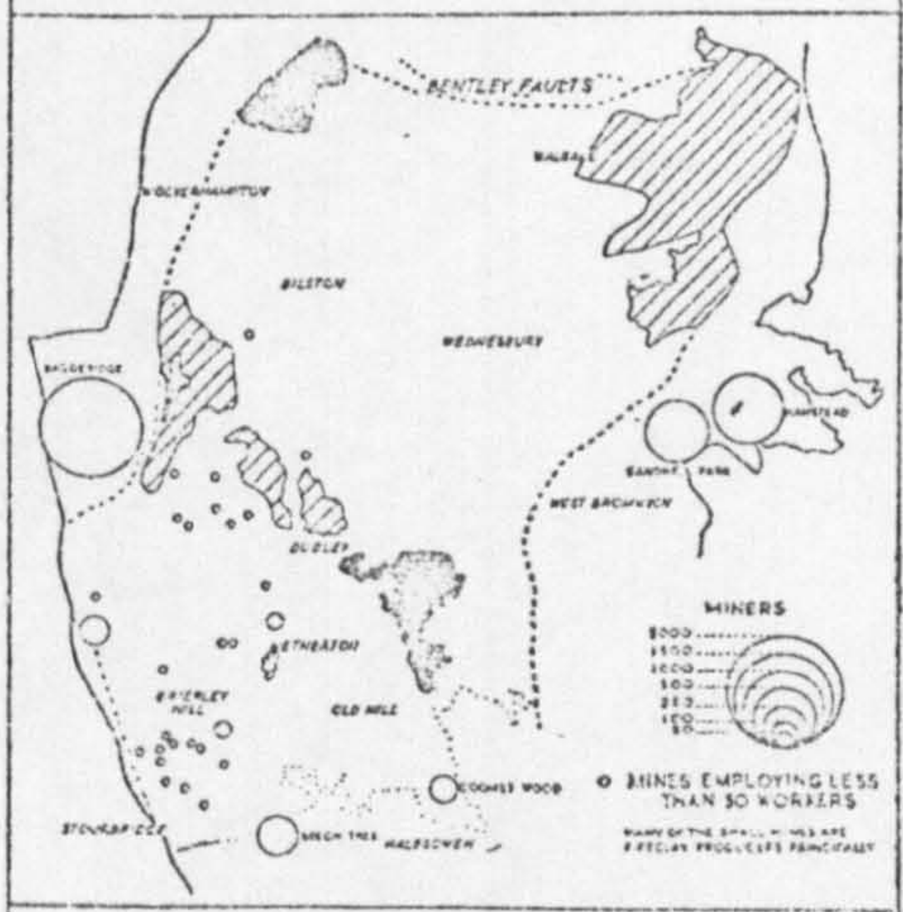
COLLIERIES 1861



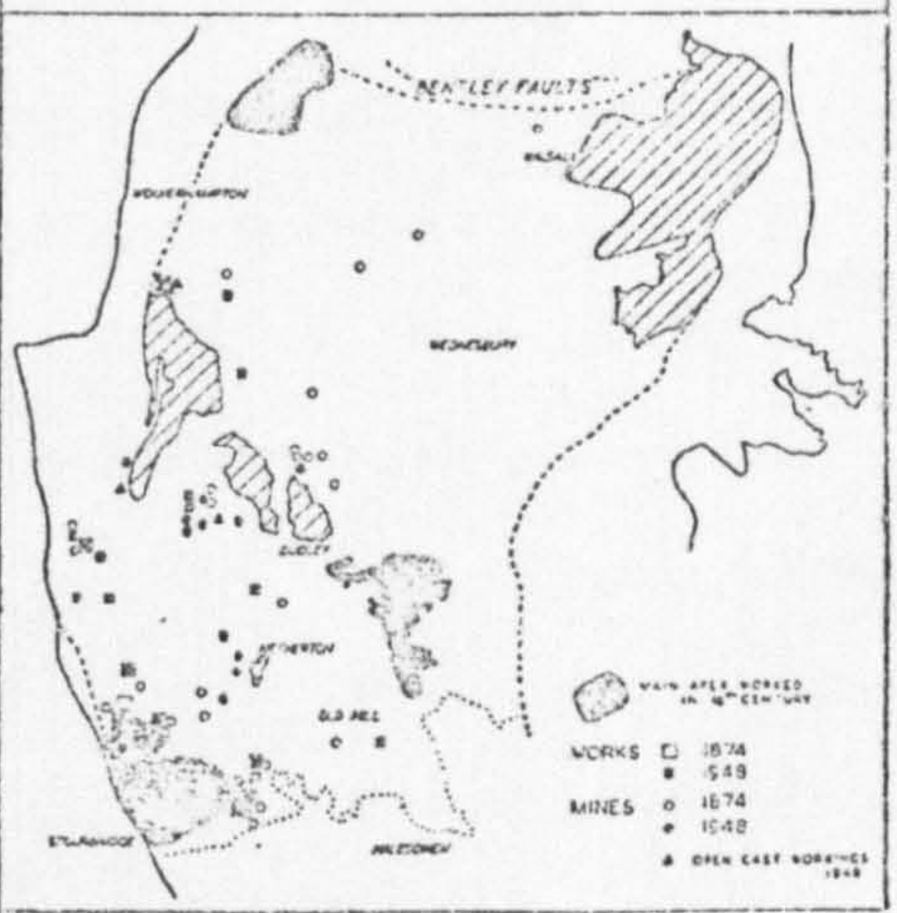
MINES AND WORKERS 1902



MINES AND WORKERS 1945



FIRECLAY MINING



BOUNDARY OF EXPOSED FIELD
OUTCROP OF CARBONIFEROUS
STOURBRIDGE
IGNEOUS

0 1 2 MILES

the rise of the Black Country had been based, the only one still boasting 'any degree of prosperity' in 1914 was the quarrying of fire and brick-clay in the area between Stourbridge and Brierley Hill.[17] Some of the most valuable deposits of clay in Great Britain were to be found here, and a large output was maintained into the 1920s.

The close association of coal with these other minerals had been the main factor in the rise of south Staffordshire and north Worcestershire as a great iron producing centre. As Burritt observed:

> Nature did for the ironmasters of the Black Country all she could - indeed everything except building the furnaces themselves. The iron ore, coal and lime - the very lining of the furnaces - were all deposited close at hand for the operation.[18]

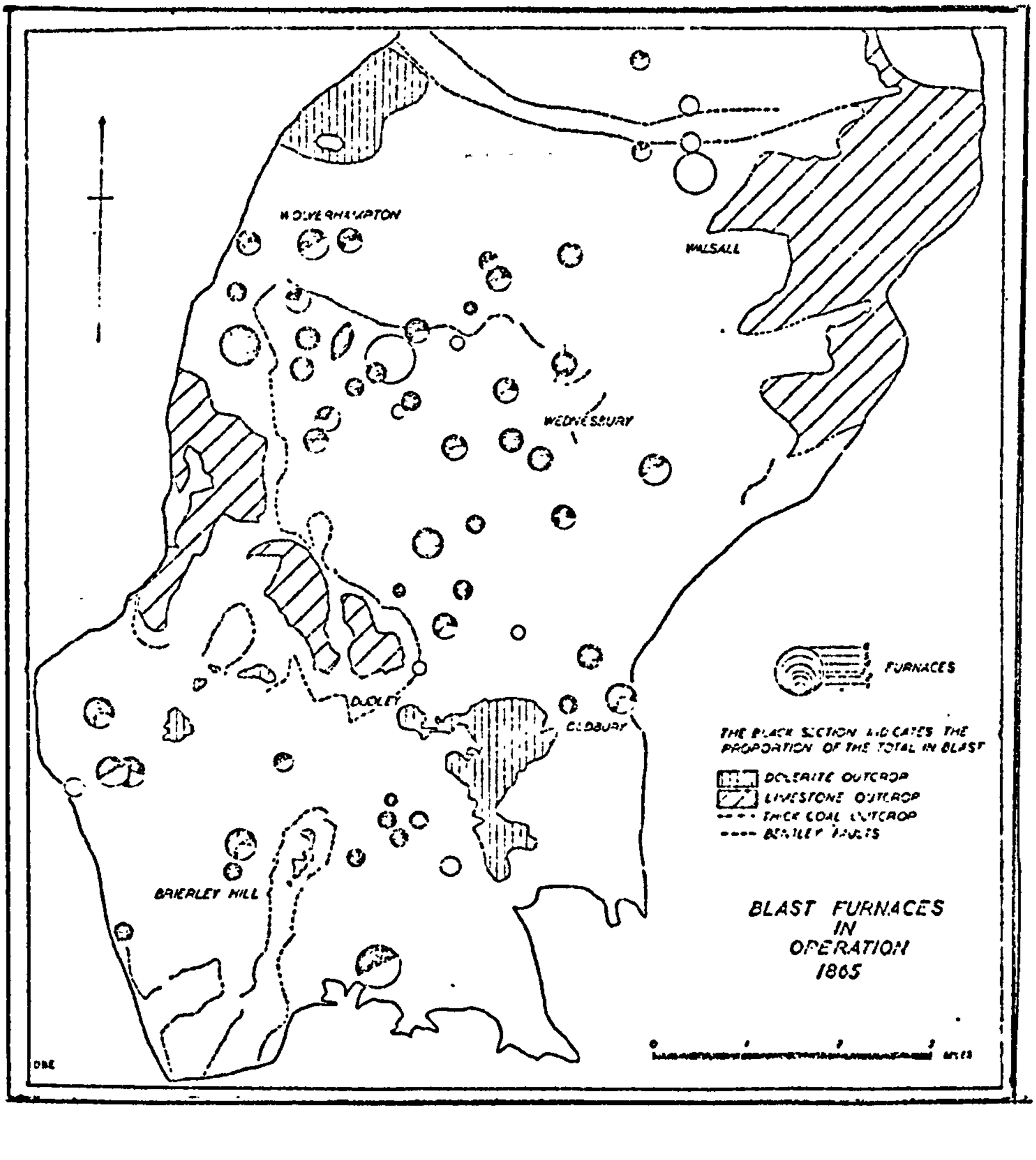
As a result of nature's prodigality production of pig iron had increased rapidly throughout the first half of the nineteenth century until in 1856 south Staffordshire and north Worcestershire possessed 147 blast furnaces producing 777,000 tons of pig iron, almost 22% of total British production. By 1860 increased production costs consequent on failing supplies of local raw materials, and the rapid rise of newer producing centres in Lancashire, Cumberland and Cleveland had resulted in a sharp fall in output, and in that year only 470,000 tons of pig, representing 12% of national output, were produced.[19] Output recovered to 726,000 tons in 1871 and remained over 670,000 tons during 1872 and 1873 but

collapsed to 450,000 tons in the next year. The iron industry in the country as a whole passed through 'evil times' between 1875 and 1886, but in the Black Country the slump was markedly more severe than elsewhere, and it marked the beginning of permanent decline.

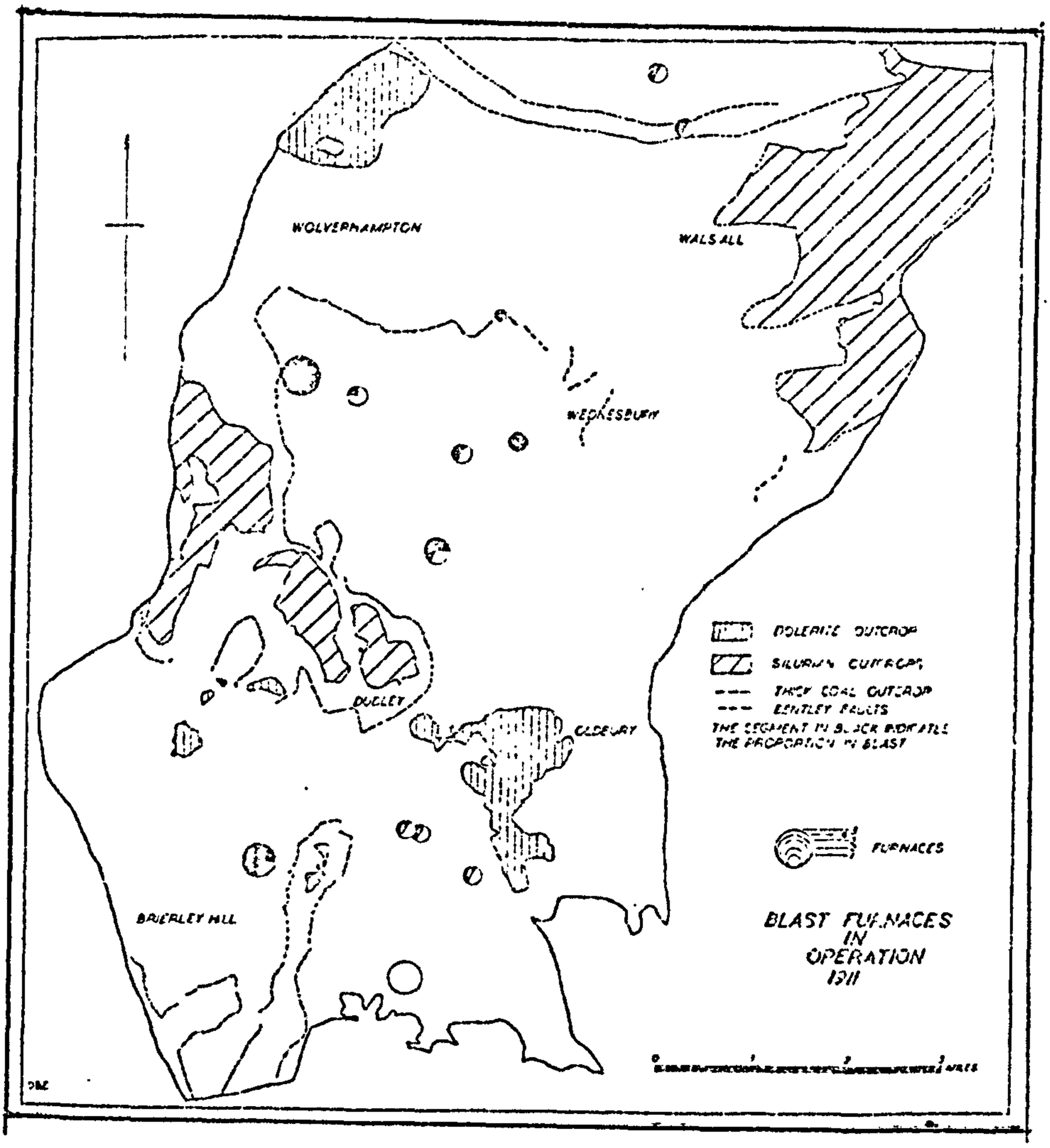
By 1886 the number of blast furnaces in the area had fallen to 85, of which only 22 were in blast, and by 1913 to 29 furnaces, of which only 21 were blowing.[20] This decline in the number of furnaces was accompanied by advances in technique involving economies in the use of fuel and an increase in capacity of the typical plant so that from the middle 1880s production of pig iron actually rose. Averaging 311,000 tons per year between 1885 and 1887 annual output rose to about 350,000 tons in the early 1890s. After 1893 output fell for a time but from 1896 production again rose steadily, and in 1907 reached 470,000 tons for the first time since 1875, and during the three pre-war years annual output averaged 460,000 tons.[21] (The number and distribution of blast furnaces in 1865 and 1911 is shown in Maps 4 and 5).

This development was largely due to the fact that, with the growth in the number of its foundries and engineering plants, the Black Country was, from the 1890s, becoming a larger and larger market for iron and steel. In addition, the local supply of 'puddlers' tap,' which in the 1890s cost only 5/- per ton, was a cheap and valuable raw material for the manufacture of basic iron for Bessemer converters, so that as the demand for forge iron

MAP FOUR


WOLVERHAMPTON
WALSALL
WEDNESBURY
DUDLEY
CLOSBURY
BRIERLEY HILL
FURNACES
THE BLACK SECTION INDICATES THE PROPORTION OF THE TOTAL IN BLAST
DOLERITE OUTCROP
LIMESTONE OUTCROP
THICK COAL OUTCROP
BASSETT FAULTS
BLAST FURNACES IN OPERATION 1865
DBE

MAP FIVE


WOLVERHAMPTON
WALSALL
WEDNESBURY
DUDLEY
OLDBURY
BRIERLEY HILL
DOLERITE OUTCROP
SILURIAN OUTCROP
THICK COAL OUTCROP
BENTLEY FAULTS
THE SEGMENT IN BLACK INDICATES THE PROPORTION IN BLAST
FURNACES
BLAST FURNACES IN OPERATION 1911

declined many pig iron producers took advantage of the local supplies of this material to supply the basic steel works. By 1894 one third of the Black Country's production of pig consisted of basic iron, and in that year the area produced 75,000 tons of this material, more than one-quarter of total British output.[22]

The competitive advantage in the production of pig iron arising from the availability of cheap puddlers' tap was, however, only temporary. By 1913 its price had risen considerably, and one main factor in bringing about the temporary recovery in local pig iron output was thus disappearing. This was due to the decline of the finished iron trade in the Black Country.

In 1860 south Staffordshire and north Worcestershire probably produced more than one-third of the total British output of wrought iron. In that year, of 4,147 puddling furnaces in Britain 1,588 were located in the Black Country, and since much of the finished iron produced in this area was of a higher grade than that produced elsewhere, its proportion of total national output in value terms was probably higher than this.[23] The number of puddling furnaces in the Black Country rose to a peak of 2,155 in 1872, but 'after 1873 the local iron trade began to decay ----- The glory of Staffordshire iron departed, notwithstanding the renown of so many of our local ironmasters and their famous brands of iron.'[24]

The number of puddling furnaces remained over 2,000 until 1877, but thereafter decline accelerated, until by 1894 there were only 683 furnaces in south Staffordshire and north Worcestershire. Their total production of puddled bar in that year was 389,000 tons compared with a figure of 660,000 tons only twelve years earlier.[25] Decline continued unchecked until 1906, but from that year until the outbreak of war there appears to have been a slight improvement, and in 1913 there were 661 puddling furnaces in the Black Country, belonging to 32 firms. The annual production of puddled iron, at less than 350,000 tons, was only about one-third of that reached during the peak years of the early 1870s.[26]

In spite of this decline south Staffordshire retained its relative importance as a wrought iron centre and over the period 1887-1914 was responsible for producing more than one-third of total British output. During the early 1890s the area still led in production of bar iron and produced 50% of the iron sheets manufactured in Great Britain, and even when the introduction of steel resulted in its losing the greater part of the sheet trade the Black Country continued to supply a large proportion of the country's requirements of high grade wrought iron.[27] The advent of steel nevertheless did have a marked effect on the south Staffordshire iron trade, by transforming wrought iron from being the staple raw material of the metal using trades into a speciality, employed only for

a few purposes. This transformation was well advanced by 1914, when only the manufacturers of articles likely to suffer from corrosion or requiring a reliable weld, such as ships' chains and cables, anchors, ship fittings and certain kinds of tubes still preferred wrought iron to cheap mild steel.

The decline of iron in the Black Country was not compensated by any equivalent growth of the steel industry. A basic Bessemer plant was established at Bilston in the early 1880s and shortly afterwards the Patent Shaft and Axletree Company began to produce acid and basic open hearth steel at its Wednesbury works. In 1893 a basic open hearth steel plant was laid down at the Earl of Dudley's Round Oak Works, in Brierley Hill, and was greatly extended in the years to 1914. These developments were, however, exceptional and none of the remaining iron-masters of South Staffordshire changed over to steel production. Consequently, as a result of the greater developments which had taken place elsewhere, in 1913 the Black Country was of small importance as a steel centre. In 1904 the area produced only about 200,000 tons of open hearth steel and 100,000 tons of Bessemer, and while these may have increased slightly over the next ten years the Black Country did not become relatively more important as a steel making centre.[28]

The decline of its great basic industries was inevitably reflected in the decay of the Black Country's

metal using craft industries. The reduced availability and increasing cost of local raw materials after the mid 1870s rendered them increasingly vulnerable to competition from improving machine methods, and many of the area's traditional crafts were virtually eliminated in considerably less than a working lifetime.

The most spectacular decline occurred in the wrought nail trade. By 1860 this was already a contracting industry, the numbers employed falling from about 50,000 in 1830 to only 20,000 in 1866 as competition from machine made nails became increasingly fierce.[29] Decline was checked and may even have been temporarily reversed by the effects of the great coal and iron boom in the early 1870s, and in 1875 the trade was reported to be flourishing.[30] The collapse of the boom brought a resumption of decline and by 1881 the number of nailers in the Black Country had fallen to 15,000. Within a further ten years it had fallen to less than 8,000, and with the introduction of cheap basic steel further enhancing the competitive position of the machine through the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century, by 1914 only a few hundred hand nailers remained. These were to be found mainly in the small towns and villages of the south-west sector, making spike and brush nails which still fell outside the scope of machinery.

A similar development took place in the lock trade. In 1868 450 employers and 5,000 hands were engaged in

this trade, mainly in Wolverhampton and Willenhall.[31] In 1884 the typical establishment still consisted of 'a man and some half a dozen apprentices,' turning out 'an incredible quantity of locks at an incredible price.'[32] These were made largely of cast iron cases and forged or malleable iron parts, filed and assembled by craftsmen, but as steel displaced iron the cases increasingly came to be pressed out of steel, and the bolts to be produced from drawn sections. Milling machines displaced hand filing and 'what had previously been a task for the craftsman became a problem for the engineer.' In consequence the number of locksmiths in Wolverhampton had fallen to just over 1,000 by the first years of the twentieth century.[33]

Equally great changes occurred in nut and bolt manufacture. At the end of the 1860s the workforce of 8,000 engaged in this trade, mainly in Darlaston and Smethwick, consisted largely of craftsmen.[34] They were kept busy through the early 1870s, but from about 1880 machinery increasingly began to replace hand processes until by 1914 the industry's labour force consisted in the main of a mass of machine operatives and a few skilled toolmakers. The related trade of screw manufacture underwent a similar transformation. By 1911 three-fifths of its 4,800 workers were women machine operatives, and of about 11,000 workers employed in the manufacture of nuts and bolts, screws and rivets, probably less than 1,500

were hand workers.[35]

By contrast with the metal trades the decline of the flint glass trade stemmed largely from the absence of technical change. The preference of the masters for producing high grade goods produced by traditional methods rather than try to secure a share of the growing market for cheaper qualities by reorganising their plant and productive processes, combined with the resistance of the men to innovation led, after 1875, to a marked increase in imports and a decline in exports. As a result it was reported in 1879 that there had been less expansion in flint glass than in any other local industry during the preceding ten years, and from the middle 1880s the industry's problems were intensified as foreign competition increased. During the 1890s American pressed glass 'forced its way into the British market,' and over the next decade a large share of both home and foreign markets was captured by German and Austrian firms. By 1914 the conservatism of owners and men in face of improved methods of manufacture and lower production costs abroad 'were slowly bringing ruin to the industry.'[36]

In the metal using trades from the late 1890s the main impetus to change no longer came from the increasing cost and scarcity of local raw materials, but from a completely new source. Following the enactment of the Light Locomotives on the Highways Act in 1896 the motor industry in the Birmingham district surged forward

dramatically and in doing so brought marked changes in the industrial structure of the Black Country. By 1911 16,800 workers in the Birmingham district were engaged in the production of motor car chassis and bodies, or as motor mechanics.[37] The Black Country had only a small share in these trades, which were concentrated mainly in Coventry and Birmingham itself, but the rise of the motor car was of major significance for the area by virtue of the demand it created for parts and accessories. The effect of this on the production of nuts, bolts, screws and rivets has been noted, and in addition to transforming the traditional trades of the Black Country the growth of the car industry was also responsible for the development of what had been relatively minor occupations into major sources of employment.

The most important of these was the manufacture of weldless steel tubes. Up to the 1870s most of the ferrous tubes produced in Birmingham and the Black Country were welded conduits for conducting gas and water. Then from the early 1880s the cycle industry began to use weldless tubular frames, combining lightness with great strength, and in response to this demand a new branch of the tube industry began to evolve which eventually far surpassed its predecessor. From the late 1890s the additional demand from motor cycle and motor car firms further stimulated this section of the industry, until by 1914 some 3000 persons were engaged in it. These were

employed mainly by the older firms in the Wolverhampton area which had branched into the new field, and the newer firms of Accles and Pollock in Oldbury and Walter Somers of Halesowen. The manufacture of springs was similarly affected. By the end of the nineteenth century this was already a substantial industry, built on supplying laminated springs and coil springs for railway rolling stock, horse drawn carriages and spring balances. Then the new demands emanating from the motor manufacturers 'swept the industry into a position of incomparably greater importance,' and in West Bromwich the production of both types of spring 'became a leading trade.'[38]

The rise of the motor car had an even more dramatic impact on the production of leather goods, where it rescued an ailing trade from possible extinction. The tanners and curriers of Walsall, finding their markets for saddles and harnesses contracting sharply after 1900, turned readily to the production of leather upholstery for cars, and with a growing demand for cycle saddles and leather tool bags providing a further stimulus, the leather trades remained the main source of employment in Walsall long after the internal combusion engine superseded the horse as a main means of motive power. Further, the survival of the leather trade in Walsall meant that the town was able to acquire a major share in a new branch of this trade which grew rapidly after 1890, namely the manufacture of fancy leather goods, such as sports

equipment and travelling bags. Employment in this branch of the leather trade in the Birmingham district rose from about 500 in 1891 to between 2,000 and 2,500 in 1901 and to 4,700 in 1911, and this appears to have been shared equally between Birmingham and Walsall.[39]

In addition to stimulating or rescuing established Black Country trades the growth of the motor industry also resulted in the rise of completely new industries in the area. The introduction of the light high speed engine created demands for new alloys and about 1900 a completely new industry, the manufacture of aluminium castings, was brought into the district when a firm was established at Smethwick. At about the same time the production of phosphor bronze for bearings was also introduced into the Black Country area for the first time.[40]

The rise of the Birmingham district as the leading British centre for the manufacture of cars and motor cycles and their component parts during the two decades prior to 1914 was thus of major consequence for the Black Country. While only Wolverhampton had any share in the production of completed vehicles the smaller towns came to provide the finished or semi-manufactured parts.

> The springs came from Smethwick, West Bromwich and Redditch, the weldless tubes from Wolverhampton and Oldbury, the wheels from Dudley and Bilston, the saddles and leatherwork from Walsall and the multitude of castings, pressings and stampings from many Black Country centres.[41]

A second major influence in transforming the economic structure of the Black Country from the end of the nineteenth century was the growth of the electricity supply industry. The manufacture of electrical apparatus was established in the area in the 1860s but remained of negligible importance until the establishment of the Birmingham Electric Supply Company in 1889 brought a major upsurge in activity. Firms producing dynamos, motors and pumps were established in both Birmingham and the Black Country, and following the opening of the General Electric Company's factory at Witton, in Birmingham in 1901, the Birmingham district quickly became a leading centre for the production of switchgear, transformers and meters as well as motors, dynamos and pumps. Birmingham itself had the largest share of this industry, but Wolverhampton was second in importance and Smethwick also became a main centre.[42]

In parallel with the rise of the electrical trades, in the early years of the twentieth century a completely new manufacture became increasingly important in the Black Country. The growth and increasing complexity of industry gave rise to a demand for sophisticated filing and costing systems, thus creating a market for account books, ledgers and files. In response to this demand a number of firms were established in the area, but notably in West Bromwich and Smethwick. These firms then diversified into office furniture, such as filing cabinets,

desks and letter racks, until by 1914 production of office equipment employed over 2,000 people.[43]

Two other industries to experience similar rapid growth were chemicals and paint and varnish manufacture. The former industry, centred on Oldbury, employed over 3000 workers in 1914, which was between three and four times the number employed in 1887. This growth was mainly consequent on the rise of industrial chemistry during the decade prior to the outbreak of war. The increased production of paint and varnish was mainly in response to the demands of new industries. Enamels were required for the local gas fire, stove and tube manufactures, while the motor trade created a large new market for paint. Wolverhampton was the main Black Country centre of this trade.[44]

All the industries dealt with so far had some association, in varying degrees of closeness, with the Black Country's traditional concern for metal, but other sectors of industry came to play an increasingly important part in the economic life of the area in the first years of the twentieth century. The most notable of these was the production of food and drink. By 1914 Wolverhampton was the location of a number of sizeable breweries. A large sausage making firm, Messrs. Palethorpe, had been established at Tipton, in the very heart of the Black Country, and in Brierley Hill the firm of Marsh and Baxter was also a large producer of sausages and pork pies.[45]

Thus, between 1860 and 1914 the economic structure of the Black Country underwent marked change. The basic industries of coal mining and iron production lost their pre-eminent position and in fact declined to positions of relative insignificance. The economic base of the area was considerably widened by the adaptation of existing firms and industries to supply new markets, and by the rise of new industries. This did not mean that the Black Country lost its identity as a district economic unit. As the original basis of the area's distinction from Birmingham, its primacy in coal and iron, was eroded by the decline of those industries so a new one developed. Birmingham now became the home of the assembly industries, and the lighter and 'finer' trades such as jewellery and silversmithing, while the Black Country produced mainly the 'heavier' products and components required by Birmingham industry. Similarly in spite of the centre of mining shifting to Cannock there was no migration of industry to that area. Cannock coal was of a non-coking variety and therefore unsuitable for iron production and many manufacturing purposes; and the development of the national transport system with Birmingham and the Black Country as a main focus was more than sufficient to offset Cannock's advantage as a source of coal supply. In 1914 the Black Country remained an identifiable economic entity. Though it had undergone important and far reaching changes, by drawing on its 'accumulated momentum of

tradition and skill' it retained its essential character of fifty years earlier, of 'one great workshop, both above ground and below', with a day time appearance of 'one vast loosely knit town of humble homes, amid cinder heaps and fields stripped of vegetation by smoke and fumes.'[46]

Social Change. The transition of the Black Country from an economy based on primary industries to the economy of general engineering took place during the period known to economic history as the Great Depression. Modern research has established that the idea of a unified period of depression is largely illusory, and that for labour generally real wages actually rose.[47] The experience of the working men and women of the Black Country was quite different, and for them the Great Depression was a real and very painful experience. Living standards were sharply reduced and many families lived on the edge of destitution and starvation.

The standard of living for any community is determined by the interaction of three factors - prices, wages and the volume of employment generally available to the workforce. The main factor depressing living standards in the Black Country during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the behaviour of the third of these variables. With the notable exception of house rents, the prices of most basic commodities moved favourably from the mid 1870s until the end of the century. Thus the price of coal fell from 16/- per ton in 1874 to

only 4/6 per ton in 1899, and the price of men's shoes was reduced from 8/6 per pair in 1876 to 5/- per pair in 1899. An index of the cost of food fell from 120 in 1877 to only 87 in 1885 and 1886. It rose again to 98 in 1891 but thereafter fell back to only 75 in 1894 and in 1899 it stood at 81 (1850 = 100).[48]

Regarding wages, an outstanding and rather surprising characteristic of the Black Country economy throughout the nineteenth century is the stability of wages for many sections of workers over long periods. An index of miners' wages in money per day ranged only between 100 and 117 during the period 1875 to 1887, with the exception of 1879 when it fell to 92 (1850 = 100). Similarly, the tonnage rates of iron puddlers varied by only 1/- per ton between 1886 and 1896. Stable wage rates were also typical for labourers. From 1847 to the end of the century, for general labourers the daily wage did not deviate by more than 2d either way from a figure of 2/6, and the Oldbury firm of Albright and Wilson paid their labourers 3/6 per day from 1885 to 1911.[49]

By contrast with the favourable movement of prices and the stability of wage rates the volume of employment in the Black Country contracted sharply after 1875. An index of business activity for the area, ranging from six to one (the figures indicating the number of days per week on which work was likely to be available for the labour force as a whole) never rose above four between 1876 and

1887. The average figure was just over three and in both 1878 and 1879 it stood at only two. For the next six years the index maintained a level of five or six but the middle 1890s were again bad years and between 1894 and 1897 the index again failed to rise above four.[50]

Persistent and widespread unemployment had dramatic and unfortunate consequences for real wages. Thus, the real wages of miners between 1875 and 1887 corrected for unemployment ranged from 26 to 84, compared with a range of between 78 and 126 assuming full employment, and a range of between 100 and 117 in the index of wages in money per day. Similarly, the real wages of iron puddlers when corrected for unemployment stood at only 59 in 1887, compared with a figure of 86 assuming full employment; for labourers a real wage of 128 in 1885 assuming full employment became a wage of only 64 when corrected for unemployment. (1850 = 100 for all indices).[51]

Endemic unemployment was thus the main factor determining the adverse movement of real wages in the Black Country in the Great Depression. Precise assessment of the standard of life afforded by such wages is difficult but some estimates can be made. These involve establishing the minimum expenditure necessary for a family of a man, wife and two small children to live at a minimum standard of comfort, and at the level of subsistence. It is calculated that in 1850 the 'minimum comfort' wage was 25/- per week, and that over the next

half century it varied between a high point of 28/- in 1860 and a low of 23/9 in 1890. Reduced to an index with 1850 as the base year this is a range of between 112 and 95. The subsistence wage is estimated at exactly half the minimum comfort wage so an index of its movement has the same 17 point range.

Thus both the wage required to maintain minimum comfort and the subsistence wage moved only within narrow limits over the whole of the second half of the nineteenth century while real wages fell sharply after 1875. The effect of this would be to reduce very considerably the material living standards of most Black Country workers and their families. These were already very low in the middle years of the nineteenth century. In Bilston in 1841 only 27% of male workers earned sufficient to maintain a family at or above the minimum standard of comfort. The larger towns such as Wolverhampton or Walsall might have shown better figures but the situation in industrial villages with a high proportion of domestic workers, such as Halesowen, Cradley Heath or Gornal would certainly have been much worse. The ultimate effect of the massive unemployment of the Great Depression on living standards was to widen the extent of existing poverty to the point where 20% of Black Country families lived 'almost perpetually below the minimum necessary to maintain life,' and another 53% below the minimum standard of comfort.[52]

As well as being the main factor depressing material living standards heavy unemployment had an important consequence for working class attitudes in the Black Country. These had long been characterised by 'a spirit of exaggerated independence and insubordination,' and a proneness to 'jealous and envious feelings.' The fierce competition for work which resulted from the collapse of the area's prosperity in the early 1870s intensified individualism further, to the point where 'in mine and forge and workshop,' men became 'distant and isolated, and instead of trying to assist and help their fellows, watching with somewhat jealous eyes lest a brother toiler should get in favour with the employer.'[53] Such attitudes were a considerable obstacle to any form of collective social action, and to trade union organisation in particular.

An overstocked labour market also had the effect of prolonging the existence of dying industries. By enabling wages in these industries to be forced down it blunted the impetus to change and enabled thousands of workers to cling to decaying trades, often with agonising consequences. These were most apparent in the nail trade. In 1868 Elihu Burritt predicted that 'thousands must suffer' in the transition of this industry from a productive system based on domestic outwork to one based on machinery. Forty years later the truth of his prediction was clearly marked on the face of one of the last nailers, left with

'no hope in his face, no happy memories in his eyes,' but only 'the look of a man who has nothing to hope for in this world and nothing to fear in the next.'[54]

The change from a system of largely domestic employment to one based on factory methods affected many other groups of Black Country workers besides the nailers, and it had important effects on the nature of the work place and on work discipline. In general these involved a change from the flexibility characteristic of domestic work to more systematic work outside the home in workshops and factories. In Lye and Wollescote for example,

> the children of nailers by the end of the century were frost cog makers or iron plate workers in the hollow-ware industry. In their heyday their forefathers would have taken things easy on Mondays, rested sometimes for several hours at midday on a working day, broken off work to attend to the rabbits or pigeons kept in the workshop, worked all night on Fridays, and gone off for weeks at a time to help with the harvest. The hours of the iron plate workers, many of them women, may have been fewer in the aggregate, but they were certainly more regular.[55]

It is impossible to quantify the extent of this change but estimates for Stourbridge and Lye indicate that by 1914 technological advance may have transformed the working lives of at least one-third of the work force of 1851[56] and for towns like Darlaston and Smethwick, containing industries where the pace of technological change was particularly rapid, the proportion was probably higher. However, the effect of this change should not be exaggerated. It took place over a long period and in

many Black Country metal using industries the typical place of work in 1914 was a workshop, not a factory, and the regimentation characteristic of the cotton and woollen mills of Lancashire and Yorkshire was conspicuously absent.

Further, some important industries were hardly touched by the process of change. In the non-domestic trades such as coal mining, iron manufacture and glass making the fact of their decline gave no incentive to change established ways in the interest of higher productivity. Marginally lower selling prices resulting from increased productivity could do little to offset the massive handicaps under which the coal and iron industries of the Black Country operated after the mid 1870s. In addition, in both these industries wages were linked directly to the selling price of the product over most of the period to 1914 so that any reduction in prices would have lowered wages pari passu and therefore held little attraction for the workers engaged in them.

As a result methods of work in these industries changed little in the half century before 1914. The application of steam power improved winding and haulage in pits, more powerful hammers came into use in the iron-works, but the basic processes remained the same. As late as 1938 only 6% of coal mined in the Black Country was cut with the aid of machinery, and less than 2% carried by conveyors;[57] the remainder was hewed by

pikemen and dragged to the pit bottom by loaders exactly as it had been 100 years earlier. Puddlers worked their furnaces in 1914 in very much the same way as their grandfathers had done, and the techniques of making and cutting glass in use at the outbreak of the Great War would have been instantly recognisable to glassmakers who fought in the Napoleonic Wars. Similarly the organisation of production and habits of work in these industries changed very little. The small team of workers, paid by one of their own number was still the basic unit of the workforce in 1914, and little or no work was done on St. Monday.

Industrial stagnation was reflected in a static social structure. The headlong growth of total population which had been characteristic of the Black Country during the first half of the nineteenth century was abruptly checked between 1861 and 1871. The overall rate of population growth which had been 38% between 1831 and 1841 fell to only 9% during the 1860s and two important towns Dudley (-2%) and Bilston (-1%) actually showed a decline in population. The figures for a number of other towns reveal very low rates of growth, and only Smethwick, with an increase of 28%, Rowley Regis (19%), Darlaston (14%) and Wolverhampton (12%) recorded reasonable growth rates.

The figure for overall growth reflects the beginnings of the exhaustion of the area's natural resources and its

decline as an iron centre. The exceptions can be explained in terms of special factors. The growth of population in Smethwick on the eastern extremity of the Black Country reflected the beginning of a rapid growth of lower middle class housing in the town, which by 1914 had made it virtually a suburb of Birmingham. The continued growth of Rowley Regis was probably due to the expansion of mining activity in the district consequent on the delayed exploitation of the coalfield in Old Hill and Blackheath, while the increase of population in Darlaston reflected the growth and prosperity of the nut and bolt trade.

By 1881 the effects of the Great Depression, the progressive exhaustion of the coalfield and the impact of competition from Bessemer steel on the local iron trade were being fully felt. The overall growth rate was fractionally higher, at 10%, but a greater number of towns had lost population including Walsall (-8%), Bilston (-6%), Darlaston (-6%), Wednesbury (-2%), Sedgley (-2%). Smethwick and Wolverhampton, however, continued to expand as did Halesowen, Wednesfield, and West Bromwich.

The census of 1891 reflected the worst years of the Great Depression. The growth rate for the area as a whole, at only 8%, was the lowest of the century. The fall of 9% recorded for Willenhall reflected its decline as a centre of lockmaking and the closure of many pits in the area, while Stourbridge, where the glass trade

was depressed, Tipton and Dudley all recorded smaller declines. Only with the lifting of depression in the 1890s did the rate of population growth begin to increase again. The census returns of 1901 revealed an overall increase of 13% and all towns in the Black Country recorded population increases, with Smethwick (51%) leading the way.

Within this largely static total population there was little significant change in social composition. In 1861, of all males over the age of 20 in the Wolverhampton Registration District 94% were employed in industry, agriculture trade and building. Only 2% were middle class and there was a further 1% in each of the categories of lower middle class and commercial class. In 1901 of all males over the age of ten in 19 Black Country towns only 2.75% belonged to the commercial and business classes, with the remaining 97.25% engaged in transport, building, food and drink, dress and industry.[58] The population and ethos of the Black Country remained overwhelmingly working-class into the early years of the twentieth century. The observation made in 1873, that 'we have no gentry whatever ----- hence we live in an inglorious ignorance of that which the world calls "society" and our words and manners are of the plainest ----- we are all low people here,' was just as applicable 40 years later.[59]

The passive resignation of the 'low people' of the

Black Country in face of great hardship is explicable in terms of a number of factors. One of these is the influence of nonconformity. By deflecting guilt for the abundant social evils which beset working men on to bad employers or foggers or to their own improvidence, this undoubtedly had some effect in stifling discussion of these misfortunes in terms of class structure and so blunting the edge of class conflict.

However, the importance of this influence in shaping working class attitudes should not be exaggerated. While nonconformity and Methodism in particular was certainly strong in the Black Country in mid century, congregations in the Wesleyan and New Connexion chapels were largely middle class. The Primitive Methodists, with their vigorous and colourful services and camp meetings and their democratic constitution, appear to have been more successful among the working class, particularly in the smaller towns and industrial villages;[60] and certainly many Black Country trade union leaders received their first grounding in 'the language and art to express their antagonism to grim conditions and injustice,' in Primitive Methodist chapels. There is, however, nothing to indicate that in the Black Country any more than elsewhere the influence of the Primitives penetrated much below the 'superior working class,' and even here it probably declined through the later years of the nineteenth century.[61]

Probably more important in preventing social unrest were two factors implicit in what has been said already, namely the slow pace of industrial and social change and the extreme severity of conditions. For the great mass of Black Country workers there was no abrupt transition from domestic work to the rigid routines of a factory, but rather a gradual evolution of the one system of work discipline from the other. The change remained partial and incomplete in 1914 when both the rigours of work and the harshness of life generally were tempered by the compensations attendant on a flexible work routine. Passivity deriving from the vitiation of industrial change was reinforced by the apathy consequent on living conditions that were often desperately poor. Constant insecurity of employment and an existence on the edge of privation, especially when combined with the fatalism characteristic of many Black Countrymen, are powerful solvents of initiative.

Thus, 'the pains of transition and of adjustment to a new economic equilibrium' were felt with exceptional severity in the Black Country.[62] Following the collapse of the area's prosperity in the mid 1870s the persistent unemployment consequent on industrial decline reduced living standards sharply, to the point of destitution for many, and in producing intense competition for jobs intensified further an already fierce economic individualism. Combined with the social stagnation and apathy which also

derived from economic decay, these were powerful deterrents to concerted social action and the growth of social institutions.

Notes to Chapter One on pages 491-4.

C H A P T E R T W O

IRONWORKERS' TRADE UNIONISM:

INSECURE FOUNDATIONS 1863 - 75

The Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain. In 1862 the finished iron trade of the Black Country employed about 21,000 workers and nearly every town in the area had some share in the industry.[1] The scale of production was relatively large with the typical unit employing some 250 men and youths. Production was carried out on a sub-contract basis. The ironmaster furnished the plant and raw materials, but the productive processes were carried on by subcontractors or 'forehands' hired by the iron-master. These were usually supervised by a works manager, though in smaller firms this function might be exercised by the owner himself. Each forehand was responsible for a particular process, employing such labour as he thought necessary. The men andyouths so employed were his 'underhands', and were controlled absolutely by the sub-contractor.

The ironmaster dealt only with the subcontractors and it was these he thought of as his workmen. Sub-contractors were paid by the ironmaster on a piece rate basis, but they paid their underhands day wages. Maximis-ing their own income therefore involved the subcontractors maintaining or increasing the output of their teams while keeping wages under control. Failure in either endeavour

would result in the subcontractors' income being 'squeezed' from above or below. Under this system there was obviously considerable scope for abuse and exploitation by the subcontractors, but there is little evidence to indicate that such exploitation was at all widespread. By the 'custom of the trade' underhands' day wages moved up or down in line with variations in the subcontractors' piece rates, so that when subcontractors obtained an increase of 1/- per ton, or 10%, they usually raised the wages of underhands by 2d per day, and conversely.[2]

The subcontract system did, however, mean that in any dispute between subcontractors and owners the support or otherwise of the underhands was quite irrelevant. The subcontractors were the key figures in the trade and production could not be maintained without them. The underhands could add little or nothing to their strength in any contest with the owners and organisation, when it arose, was confined almost exclusively to the subcontractors.

Subcontractors were all skilled and experienced men, with their different functions indicated by their occupational names. The 'puddler' was responsible for refining the 'pig' by stirring it with an iron bar introduced through a hole in the furnace door, thus fully exposing it to the oxidising influence of a current of air passing through the furnace. In due course the carbon was burnt out and the spongy iron was then gathered into a ball and taken to the hammer. This process was carried

out in the puddler's own furnace, with the help of one or two underhands and sometimes a boy. The puddled iron was then hammered into the form required in the mills and forges by the 'shingler.' Subsequent processes involving the conversion of the hammered iron into sheets, plates, rods and bars were carried out by 'rollers,' 'millmen' and 'furnacemen,' each employing a large team of between 10 and 20 men and youths.

Rollers, millmen and furnacemen (hereafter referred to collectively simply as millmen) tended to be 'men of some standing, many of them cultivated respectability, even gentility, regarding themselves as the aristocracy of the trade'.[3] The greater standing and self-conscious dignity of the larger subcontractors vis-a-vis the puddlers was a constant source of friction between the two groups, and this was exacerbated by such issues as the number of 'heats' per day worked by the latter. A heat involved charging the furnace, puddling the iron and removing the puddled ball, and occupied, on average, about two hours. The custom of the trade was that puddlers worked twelve hours per day, or six heats. If there were only five heats there was correspondingly less iron for the millmen to work and their earnings suffered accordingly. Consequently there had always existed a marked disinclination on the part of the millmen, and sometimes the shinglers also, to act in concert with the puddlers in any open conflict with the ironmasters.[4]

The puddlers were the most militant of the iron-workers, for a number of reasons. Puddling was the most labour-intensive process in the trade and this meant that puddlers' wages were always first to come under attack at times of declining trade. They were also the most poorly paid of the subcontractors, and the uniformity of the puddling process enabled them to feel a sense of common interest to a greater degree than the other grades, who exercised a wider range and variety of function. In addition one feature of the subcontract system acted directly against the puddlers alone, in that they were obliged to spend part of the first shift in every week 'fettling', or preparing their furnaces and working them up to the required temperature. Since they were paid on a piece rate basis this generated no income but it did involve payment to the underhands on the usual day wage basis. In some firms this loss to the puddlers was avoided by 'Sunday fettling,' but this inroad into free time merely substituted one grievance for another, and in an area where St. Monday was widely observed, one that was probably even more resented.

The solidarity of the puddlers was, however, mitigated by two factors. First, the subcontract system gave considerable scope for managers to play off puddlers against each other, particularly in the allocation of work at slack times, and many of them took advantage of this. As one manager explicitly stated, 'I always like to keep

my puddlers at variance with each other; if I can do that I can make them do anything.'[5] Second, many owners and managers would, in the event of a prolonged strike, put some of the more experienced underhands on to puddling, so that when the strike was over puddlers could easily find their positions filled by these newly promoted underhands.[6] Such a possibility obviously counselled caution in embarking on strike action in support of grievances other than those whose effects were felt immediately and directly.

Combined with the strength of the masters' association and the strongly cyclical nature of the industry the uncertain cohesion among the puddlers precluded the appearance of lasting organisation, and in the half century before 1863 puddlers' unions rose and declined in south Staffordshire, 'for want of funds and want of objects.'[7] Among the millmen the 'jockeying for promotion' consequent on the hierarchy of income, status and responsibility created by a wide variety of function provided 'fruitful ground for personal scheming and suspicions that destroy collective action,'[8] and effectively prevented the appearance of even temporary combinations.

In the early 1860s the lateral division between puddlers and the higher grades was probably widening as technical changes increased the productivity of millmen. With piece rates and underhands' wages remaining unchanged, this widened the gap between the earnings of millmen and

those of puddlers and so added to existing frictions.[9] Such common ground as did exist between them was in shared resentment of the method of wage fixing in the iron trade. This centred on the Thorneycroft scale of the South Staffordshire Ironmasters' Association. The nucleus of this association consisted of firms of high reputation manufacturing 'marked bars,' and these acted as price leaders in the industry, their 'declared' quarterly prices being generally followed by the rest of the trade.

Associated with these declared prices was a gentleman's agreement among the ironmasters concerning the piece rates to be paid to subcontractors. The cyclical nature of the industry and the high proportion of labour costs to total costs had led the ironmasters to the belief that wages must stand in a fixed relationship to prices, and in the 1840s this had crystallised into the Thorneycroft scale, setting puddlers' wages at 1/- per ton for every £1 per ton in the declared price of marked bars. Millmen's earnings were tied to this scale by the custom of varying their rates by 10% for every 1/- per ton variation in the wages paid to puddlers.[10]

This unofficial sliding scale had fairly general applicability across the Black Country, but its operation was far from smooth. At times of rising demand and prices it frequently required a strike, actual or threatened, to produce an upward movement in wages, especially when ironmasters were in process of completing contracts

negotiated at prices which had been surpassed. Equally, at the onset of depression the attempt by masters to maintain the customary relationship was often strongly resisted by the ironworkers.

It was the periodic recurrence of the first of these circumstances which gave rise to the Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain in May 1863. As trade began to revive following a prolonged depression, in the early months of 1863 an agitation developed among the puddlers for a revision of the wages basis, the demand being for wages to be related to the selling price of sheet iron instead of to bar iron. This was in fact a thinly disguised claim for an increase of 1/- per ton, and there being no change in declared prices to grant this demand would have involved the masters breaking the customary price-wage relationship.[11] They accordingly resisted, but with the trade recovery gathering momentum the men pressed their claim vigorously.

Towards the end of April there were strikes in a number of towns, and the union was formed early in the following month. Among the first 'to unfurl the flag of unionism' were William Aucott, James Capper and Thomas Piggott. The last two were Black Countrymen by birth. Aucott had been born in Hinckley, Leicestershire, the son of a barber who was a Chartist and a Methodist, and had moved to south Staffordshire as a sixteen year old youth. Now, at the age of 33 he was married to the

daughter of James Talbot, general manger of John Bagnall and Sons, iron manufacturers, and was well known locally as a leader of the temperance movement and the Primitive Methodist Church.

Led by these three, the puddlers 'took great care to make the organisation as complete as possible' and in spite of there still being no movement in prices 'decided to make a movement for the advance of wages.'[12] The strategy adopted was that of the 'rolling strike,' with a few works being brought out at a time and the strikers being supported by those remaining at work. The owners' response was to co-operate in supplying puddled bars to the works affected, so enabling shinglers and millmen to remain in employment, and for almost four months the struggle continued in this fashion. It was finally resolved by the continuing improvement in trade, which as well as creating a shortage of puddled bars and bringing a number of mills and forges to a standstill also brought with it, in August, a rise in declared prices of 10/- per ton. The masters accordingly conceded the men's claim in full, and under sustained pressure from the union a further rise of 10/- per ton in prices in September was accompanied by a second 1/- advance in wages. Thus, puddlers' wages were raised by a full 1/- per ton above the customary relationship of level shillings to pounds sterling in the selling price of iron and the jubilant puddlers, 'having succeeded in their demands, being aided

mainly by the unexpected improvement in the demand for iron, attributed their success solely to the operation of the union and at once set themselves to consolidate and extend their organisation until they made it a national union.'[13]

William Hobson, a puddler at the Earl of Dudley's Round Oak works in Brierley Hill, was appointed full time general secretary at a wage of £3 per week and active recruiting was put in hand throughout the Black Country area. Puddlers' underhands were allowed to join the union but only 'with the understanding that they receive no benefit in case of a strike, except it be a strike with the forehands against the masters,'[14] and few appear to have done so. They could add little to the union's strength and by remaining outside the older and more experienced underhands, who were most eligible for membership, had a fair chance of improving their position during a puddlers' strike.

The Associated Ironworkers' union made no attempt to extend its organisation to the millmen. The long history of friction and division between puddlers and the higher grades precluded any such move. Accordingly when the ironmasters broke the established custom of the trade and refused to raise millmen's rates in line with the increase granted to puddlers, the millmen formed their own union, the Staffordshire Millmen's Association. After a series of strikes the customary relationship between the earnings of puddlers and millmen was restored, and the millmen

then set out to emulate the puddlers by consolidating and extending their organisation. Headquarters were established in West Bromwich and William Garner, a furnaceman at Johnson's Ironworks, was appointed full time secretary, at a wage of £2/10/-d per week.[15]

By this time, the early months of 1864, the Associated Ironworkers union had recruited more than 6,000 members and established branches in Tunstall, north Staffordshire, and in a number of iron producing centres in the north of England. In doing so it had come into conflict with the National Association of Ironworkers. This was a parallel organisation to the Black Countrymen's union, and had been established in August 1862, under the presidency of John Kane, an iron roller and former Chartist. Its headquarters were in Gateshead and it too was now seeking to extend its organisation and influence. Mutual suspicion made relations between the two unions difficult from the outset, but two attempts at co-operation were made during 1864 and 1865. Both proved abortive and served only to transform suspicion into open hostility.

The first such attempt was made in the spring of 1864, when Kane's union was locked out by a number of firms in the Leeds district. At a conference with the south Staffordshire men it was agreed that the two unions should 'assist each other both morally and pecuniarily' for the duration of the lock-out,[16] but as the dispute dragged

on support by the Associated Ironworkers for their northern colleagues dwindled away to nothing. After 27 weeks and an expenditure of £17,000 the resistance of the National Association was broken, and its members returned to work on the owners' terms.

Despite the bitterness occasioned by this failure a second attempt at co-operation was made later in the same year. In December the owners in north and south Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Sheffield and the north of England gave simultaneous notice of a 10% wage reduction and representatives of the northern and southern unions met at Sheffield to decide on concerted action. Being agreed that 'there was considerable depression in the trade' they decided to accept the reduction, but subsequently the north Staffordshire men declined to follow out this decision, and instead sought to have the reduction scaled down to 5%.[17] A strike ensued, and at a delegate meeting of the Associated Ironworkers on 14 February 1865 it was resolved to support the union's Tunstall branch. In an attempt to maintain some degree of concerted action the National Association reluctantly agreed to support its own Hanley branch.

This decision was quickly reversed following a lock-out by the northern ironmasters, but with the Associated Ironworkers still standing by the Tunstall men the strike continued.[18] By now the London Trades Council had taken up the strikers' cause, but internal dissension largely

nullified the value of its support and the only practical help of any consequence from this quarter was that organised on the personal initiative of George Potter through the Bee-hive newspaper.[19] After two months and a fruitless appeal for help to the Staffordshire Millmen's Association, the Associated Ironworkers withdrew their support but with Potter's assistance the strikers continued their resistance, and only after about five months was the dispute finally brought to an end.

Following the withdrawal of their support from the north Staffordshire strikers a series of conferences was held between the National Association and the northern ironmasters, as a result of which it was apparently agreed that in return for the northern owners agreeing to discontinue their alliance with ironmasters in other districts the National Association would 'sever all communications between our union and those of north and south Staffordshire.'[20] It was later strenuously maintained by John Kane that this 'agreement' was in fact a fabrication by the owners,[21] but its presumed existence clearly ruled out any further attempts at co-operation and mutual support by the northern and southern unions. This 'betrayal' by their northern colleagues, and the futile intervention by the London Trades Council confirmed the strongly felt doubts of many Black Country ironworkers about the value of external support from any source, and its effects were still being felt 50 years later.

More immediately, resentment of the National Association was increased by its decision to move its headquarters temporarily to Walsall, in an attempt to recruit members in south Staffordshire. Predictably the attempt met with little success, and the presence in the area of a rival organisation served only to undermine further the already uncertain loyalty of Black Country ironworkers to their own union. This factor and the return of depression to the iron trade reduced membership of the Associated Ironworkers to between 900 and 1000 by the end of 1867,[22] and in the following year the union collapsed completely.

In May 1868 the south Staffordshire ironmasters gave notice of a wage reduction, the third since January 1865. The union called a general strike of puddlers and at the end of the third week members received their first strike pay, of 10/-. Immediately, non-unionists threatened that unless they too were granted some benefit from union funds they would go in at the reduction. They were accordingly granted 2/6 per week from union funds, and allowed to share in the distribution of money raised by public subscription, but by the end of the fifth week resistance to the reduction had collapsed among both members and non-members of the union and there was a general resumption of work.

The break-up of the union followed almost immediately. Those lodges with funds still in hand divided the money

among their members, and with confidence in organisation completely destroyed, 'all communications with the office, Brierley hill, (sic) ceased and victimised men had to do the best they could for themselves.' Some emigrated to America, while those less fortunate had to place themselves at the disposal of employers. The union's affairs were wound up by William Aucott and Michael Rabone, president of the Wednesbury branch. A final dividend of 3/- in the £ was declared, this realising a sum of £106/3/9d. The main disbursements were £42/8/5d to cover expenses and loss of earnings during the winding up of the association, and £15/4/5d and £30/8/11d to the general treasurer and general secretary respectively, 'to assist them a little in their present position.' Total receipts and payments by the union during its five year existence amounted to £27,899/1/1d, the main item of payment being £19,600/13/-d in strike and lock-out benefit. It was calculated that the 'two sixpences' per ton that the union had obtained for puddlers had realised £780,000 in increased wages, leaving a net gain of £752,100/18/11d after the payment of all expenses, or £188 per head of the 4,000 puddlers in south Staffordshire and north Worcestershire.[23] The Millmen's Association also appears to have broken up at this time, but no details of its dissolution have survived.

<u>The National Amalgamated Ironworkers of Great Britain</u>.

The National Association fared a little better than its

southern rival. Following the set-backs in Leeds and north Staffordshire membership recovered to about 6,500 by the middle of 1866. Of these Kane considered that about 5,000 were bona fide members on whom the union could rely.[24] A series of disputes in the second half of 1866, culminating in a 20 week lock out of 12,000 men, combined with the effects of returning depression resulted in a dramatic decline in the union's fortunes and by the end of 1867 only one-tenth of the nominal members were paying subscriptions.[25] In an attempt to revive its fortunes, in 1868 the union was reorganised and renamed the National Amalgamated Ironworkers Association of Great Britain. John Kane was appointed full time general secretary and immediately embarked on a vigorous recruiting campaign in all major ironworking centres.

This met with little success in the Black Country, where in March 1869 it was reported that there was 'nothing cheering or hopeful with respect to the present position or future prospects of the ironworkers of the south Staffordshire district, the greater part of whom seem to be living in a state bordering on savage independence, each one caring only for himself.'[26] The revival of trade in the later months of 1869 did, however, produce a degree of collective action on the part of the Black Country ironworkers. Signs of unrest crystallised into a demand for an increase of 1/- per ton on puddling rates, currently standing at 7/- per ton, and a

corresponding 10% advance for millmen.[27] The masters resisted this claim for some weeks, but a break in their resistance came in October. Consequent on the issue of strike notices by the Wednesbury men the puddlers at the largest ironworks in Wednesbury, the Patent Shaft and Axletree Company, were offered, and accepted, an advance of 6d per ton.

Agitation in other towns continued until other firms conceded a settlement on the Patent Shaft basis of 6d per ton to puddlers, with the rates of millmen unchanged. The owners defended this departure from established practice, whereby the wages of puddlers and millmen moved up and down together, on the ground that since there had been no change in declared prices the increase granted to puddlers must be regarded as a special bonus and implied no commitment to raise the wages of the higher grades.[28]

Among the ironworkers confusion reigned. Some puddlers accepted the 6d per ton increase while others stood out for the full claim of 1/-. Some feared that acceptance of the masters' offer might destroy the principle whereby the wages of all ironworkers moved up or down together and so further weaken what little solidarity existed among them. Others welcomed the opportunity of breaking with this principle. 'Shinglers and rollers must look after themselves, they never came to the meetings,' was one sentiment freely expressed.[29] Still others saw in the situation an opportunity to bring

home to the millmen the error of their ways. 'In the past the millmen have always sold the ironworkers. Now at last perhaps all classes will be united,' was the hope of many puddlers.[30]

A similarly confused situation prevailed among the millmen. At some works all the men continued to work at the existing rate. At others there were partial strikes in support of the demand for restoration of the customary position vis-a-vis the puddlers. The situation was finally resolved by a rise in iron prices. In November the ironmasters declared a rise of £1 per ton in the price of marked bars, and in accordance with established practice puddlers' rates were increased by 1/- per ton, and those of millmen by 10%. In addition the puddlers retained the 6d bonus previously granted, making their wages 8/6d per ton.[31]

Through the early months of 1870 trade continued to improve and there developed a loosely organised agitation for a further increase of 1/- per ton and 10%, but this collapsed when resisted by the masters.[32] By the middle of the following year, with the rising demand for iron pushing prices steadily upwards another movement for an advance developed. This time the claim was for 6d per ton and 5%, in line with the increase recently granted to the northern ironworkers. The agitation centred on Wednesbury and Great Bridge, and though it never became widespread or strongly organised, with trade continuing

to improve the owners conceded the puddlers' demand.

As two years previously, however, no increase was granted to millmen. The millmens' appeal to the puddlers for support in sustaining their agitation was refused and at this point, August 1871, a further element of confusion was added to the situation by the masters raising prices by 10/- per ton, and granting the customary wage increases of 6d per ton and 5%.[33] This meant that the puddlers' claim of 12 months earlier for 1/- per ton had been met in full, while the millmen had been granted only half of the 10% they were demanding. Accordingly the millmen's agitation continued for a time, but when a move was made to put in strike notices enthusiasm evaporated and the agitation petered out. This long period of confusion on wages was then given a final twist by the masters belatedly conceding the additional 5% to millmen, with the proviso that there be no further change in wages until midsummer 1872.[34]

The rising tide of prosperity in the iron trade had, at this stage, done little to increase the solidarity of ironworkers. Indeed, from this point of view it may well have been counter productive, by heightening awareness among the higher grades of the value, as a deliberate strategy, of non-co-operation with the puddlers. In the fight against successive reductions in the mid 1860s the millmen's privileged position in the trade had inhibited support for the puddlers. Because they were less numerous

than puddlers the millmen were more conspicuous to the owners and their managers, and their higher status and earnings meant they had much more to lose from the failure of any attempt to break the customary wage-price relationship at times when markets were moving against them and their position was weak. The events of the last two years had now demonstrated that in rising markets the puddlers could be relied on to act as pace setters in maintaining the relationship of wages to prices, and that the custom of the trade would raise millmens' wages in line with any advance obtained by the puddlers, thus rendering agitation by the millmen largely unnecessary.

Doubts about the viability of organisation engendered by continuing friction between the skilled grades, together with memories of the recent collapse of the Associated Ironworkers and hostility towards the northern ironworkers, largely frustrated the increasing activity of the National Amalgamated Ironworkers union in the Black Country. Despite having 196 branches and 14,000 members at the end of 1871 John Kane's union had made little impact in south Staffordshire, whose ironworkers, it was noted, did 'not appear to be particularly anxious to send their money to be dealt with by an executive so far away.'[35]

Combined with growing dissatisfaction with existing methods of wage settlement the presence in the area of

the National Amalgamated union did, however, stimulate interest among Black Country ironworkers in the establishment of a board of conciliation similar to that established for the northern trade in 1869, and by the summer of 1871 the feeling that it was time to seek an alternative to 'brutal strikes and lock outs' as a method of wage fixing was reinforced from the side of the employers. Rapidly rising prices and an increasingly acute labour shortage meant that the traditional price and wage fixing practices of the Ironmasters' Association were becoming increasingly difficult to apply in practice, and had in fact already been abandoned by some of the leading masters who were now setting their selling prices according to market conditions and making corresponding adjustments in wages.

Accordingly a conference between the two sides was held in Wolverhampton on 27 September 1871, when representatives of the Ironmasters' Association met a deputation of ironworkers. The outcome was an agreement that wages should be fixed for a specified period, at the end of which either side could apply for a revision. The rate for puddlers was fixed at 9/6 per ton, with the corresponding level for millmen, and it was agreed that these rates should apply until midsummer 1872.[36] This agreement was, however, quickly overtaken by events. As iron prices continued to rise rapidly, to between £10 and £11 per ton by the end of 1871, the ironworkers realised

they had made a poor bargain, and the masters conceded that some adjustments must be made in the agreed wage levels.

At a conference early in January 1872, the masters proposed that puddling rates should be raised immediately to 10/- per ton and maintained at that level to the end of June, with wages for the ensuing six months being related to the average price of iron in April, May and June as ascertained by an accountant mutually agreed by masters and men. They further proposed that thereafter wages should be based on the average price of bar iron of 12 selected firms belonging to the Ironmasters' Association, this to be determined by the accountant every half-year and to govern wages for the ensuing six months. The chairman of the Ironmasters' Association was at pains to stress that they were in no way committed to the formation of a board of conciliation and arbitration, but it was clear that this was the direction in which things were now moving.[37]

Amongst the ironworkers the principle of conciliation linked with a sliding scale was widely welcomed, but there emerged a number of conflicting opinions about the basis of the scale to be operated. Eventually the ironworkers polarised into two groups on this question. One group, led by Simeon Vaughan, emphasised the undesirable effects of widely fluctuating wage levels and argued for a 'moderate' wage which could be paid regardless of price

fluctuations. The other, led by James Capper and William Aucott, while accepting the validity of this view, were strongly impressed by the determination of the iron-masters to preserve the established price wage relation-ship. Hitherto this had only been operated automatically by the employers in a downwards direction. At times of rising prices pressure and agitation had almost invariably been required to secure the corresponding advance in wages.

The objective of those for whom Aucott and Capper spoke was to ensure the same strict correspondence between prices and wages in rising as in falling markets, so that 'the ironworkers would be enabled to count upon the wages they would receive with a safer calculation.' The agreed solution was to propose to the masters a wage scale for puddlers ranging from a minimum of 8/6 per ton, when the price of bar iron was £7 per ton, to 9/- per ton when bar iron was £8 per ton and maintaining this relationship of 1/- above level shillings to pounds sterling thereafter. An attempt by the National Amalgamated Ironworkers union to intervene in these discussions was rebuffed and the proposal was taken to a third conference with the iron-masters on 31 January.[38]

Here the ironworkers' proposal was modified slightly, and a scale of wages ranging from 8/6 per ton when the price of bar iron was £7/10/- per ton or less to 11/6 per ton when the price of iron was £11/10/- per ton and over

was agreed. In addition the owners, fortified by the continuing buoyancy of the product market, agreed to grant an immediate further wage increase of 6d per ton and 5% so raising the puddling rate to 10/6 per ton, this to operate until the new scheme became effective in July.[39]

At a fourth conference between the two sides in June a number of refinements were added to the scale. It was agreed that puddlers' tonnage rates should move up or down by 3d for every movement in the average price of iron of between 2/6 and 5/- per ton; that this average should be derived from all classes of bar iron except charcoal; and that the prices used were to be the realised selling prices of the twelve selected firms and not declared 'official' prices. It was further agreed at this meeting that the scale so established should be administered by a board consisting of 12 representatives of each side. On the owners' side these were to be chosen by the Ironmasters' Association and on the men's side from among members of the National Amalgamated Ironworkers union, and on this basis the South Staffordshire Iron Trade Conciliation Board came into operation in July 1872.[40]

The recognition granted to the National Amalgamated Ironworkers in the composition of the South Staffordshire Board was due acknowledgement of the rapid progress made by Kane's union in the area over the previous six months.

The success of the conciliation movement and the continuing boom had swept the cause of union along and during the first months of 1872 Black Country ironworkers had joined the National Amalgamated Ironworkers in large numbers. This prompted James Capper to call for a delegate conference of all ironworking districts

> to take into consideration the present aspects of the Iron Trade, and the present position and future prospects of all Ironworkers, and to devise the best means of protection of the interests of every class, and to make a united effort to bring the whole within the pale of one great union.[41]

A meeting was duly convened in Sheffield on 20 and 21 May. Here it was quickly resolved that the National Amalgamated union's organisation should be extended to cover all ironworking districts and the delegates agreed, on behalf of their constituents, to accept and abide by its recently revised rules. The question of appointing organising agents for the various districts proved more contentious. The president of the union, Edward Trow, a Black Country man by birth and upbringing now living and working in Darlington, argued that

> they ought to be very careful with this question or they might get back to the old cause of the breaking up of the old union. If south Staffordshire got a District Secretary then north Staffordshire would want one; if north Staffordshire got one then Yorkshire would want one; if Yorkshire got one then Cumberland would want one; and therefore Scotland would have a perfect right to one.

It was nevertheless resolved, with John Kane's support, that a full time agent should be appointed in any district

where the union had 2,000 or more recognised members. His duties would be to act as secretary to any board of conciliation formed in his district, to recruit members, to conduct correspondence on behalf of the district committee and 'to discountenance strikes that have not received the approval of two-thirds of the members of the Association.'[42]

The success of the Sheffield conference gave a further stimulus to recruitment by the National Amalgamated Ironworkers, and by 1 July it had 7,160 members in south Staffordshire. By the end of August the accredited membership had risen to 9,592, grouped in 111 lodges, and with 39 lodges not sending in returns total membership probably topped 10,000. The recommendation of the Sheffield conference regarding the appointment of agents was duly implemented, and James Capper was appointed agent for the Midland Counties with effect from 1 September.[43] The National Amalgamated Ironworkers was not a sectional union as the Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain had been, but the traditional aversion to combination among Black Country millmen meant that in south Staffordshire at least it quickly came to be dominated by puddlers. Capper and William Aucott were elected to the General Council of the National Amalgamated Ironworkers in 1873, and in 1874 Aucott became president of the union in succession to Edward Trow, following the latter's appointment as assistant secretary

to John Kane.

In his first agent's report James Capper commented with satisfaction on the 'good and mighty work' that union was accomplishing and noted the continued progress of the principle of conciliation in south Staffordshire and east Worcestershire,[44] but this principle was soon brought under strain, and by the same forces which had brought the conciliation board which embodied it into existence. In March 1873 the conciliation board met in Wolverhampton to fix the level of wages for the next months. The union's claim for an increase of 15% consequent on the recent increase in selling prices was rejected by the owners on the ground that this reflected the higher prices of raw materials, particularly coal, rather than an increased demand for iron.

There were also indications that in face of the continuing upward pressure on prices the masters were not so strongly committed as formerly to maintaining the essential feature of the sliding scale, namely the direct relationship between the selling price of iron and wage rates, but were looking for an agreement that would hold wages steady for the rest of the year. Coupled with this were signs of resentment at the growing strength and influence of the union; the chairman of the conciliation board, E. J. Barker, queried Capper's presence at the meeting, as he doubted whether he was a 'practical ironworker.'[45] When the men's side pressed their claim at

a further meeting this brought renewed attacks from the ironmasters on the principles of conciliation and unionism, and a declaration that only they could judge the level of wages the trade could afford. The practical outcome on the wages question was a compromise, an advance of 9d per ton and 7½% being agreed, effective for six months from April.[46]

The difficulties of the union leaders vis-a-vis the owners were soon compounded by pressures from below. As the great iron boom moved to its peak control of the volatile puddlers, 'a minority of whom were ready as always, to throw off all restraint and extort the highest price possible from a now almost delirious market,' became increasingly difficult. Among the millmen a particular cause of discontent was the conciliation board's practice of calculating their percentage advances on a constant base, rather than by percentage upon percentage, so that whatever absolute level prices had reached any given percentage increase in wages had a constant cash value.[47] This meant that millmen's earnings increased more slowly than those of puddlers, so narrowing the customary differential between the grades and adding to existing tensions.

In spite of these pressures and frictions the leaders managed to maintain control of the situation, and with prices holding their unprecedented high levels the summer and early autumn of 1873 were quiet. Late autumn, however,

saw an important development. As the April agreement neared its end the masters sought a 12½% wage reduction for the next three months because the continuing high level of coal prices and interest rates prevented them earning what they considered a satisfactory profit. Their claim was rejected by the men's side of the conciliation board, and with a timely arbitration award in the northern trade establishing that wages there continue unchanged until the end of the year, the owners withdrew their demand and agreed that existing wage levels in south Staffordshire be maintained until 4 January 1874.[48]

This episode focussed attention on the fact that since its formation the South Staffordshire Board had 'waited one time after another to see what would be done in the north before they settled their differences there,' and moved William Aucott to condemn its meetings as a farce.[49] Recognition and resentment of their board's satellite role, together with rising hope for the future unity of northern and southern ironworkers engendered by the progress of the National Amalgamated Ironworkers, temporarily overcame the reservations of Black Countrymen about the proposals now being put forward in the north for the establishment of a uniform sliding scale for the two areas, and meetings between owners and operatives from the two districts were convened to explore this possibility.

The proposition of the masters in both districts was that on any uniform scale that might be established wages should be based on an average of northern and southern selling prices. The northern price was itself to be an average derived from all classes of iron, while the southern price was to be that of 'merchant bars,' the lowest quality of Black Country iron. The representatives of the south Staffordshire men objected to this proposal on the ground that the high proportion of low quality rail iron produced in the north would reduce the operating price level below the existing level of south Staffordshire prices and so reduce their wages basis. Their counter suggestion that the southern price be raised by being based on all classes of iron, and their claim for 1/- per ton premium over scale wages in compensation for the 'extras' enjoyed by the northern men were both rejected by the employers,[50] but the resolve of the Black Country ironworkers to stand firm on their demands was quickly undermined as depression returned to the iron trade.

The great boom had run its course by the end of 1873 and in December a wage reduction of 7½% was imposed in both south Staffordshire and the north of England. A further reduction of 10% followed in April, and with many mills and forges working only three days a week the Black Country men withdrew their objections to the owners' renewed demands for a uniform scale.[51] Accordingly the so-called 'Derby' scale came into operation in both the

south Staffordshire and north of England trade on 4 July 1874. The first ascertainment of the new scale resulted in an advance of 2½% in wages, but successive reductions of 10% followed in October 1874 and January 1875, and a further cut of 2½% in April 1875 reduced the scale to its 'floor' of 9/6 per ton. As a result the Black Country ironworkers were now deserting the National Amalgamated Ironworkers in the same large numbers that they had joined it only three years previously. 'What is the b_____ union good for, except reductions,' was the feeling of many. By the early months of 1875 membership of the National Amalgamated Ironworkers in south Staffordshire and east Worcestershire had been reduced to about 3,000, and many lodges had broken up and divided their funds.[52]

The sharp fall in wages also revived doubts about the method of wage fixing, and in particular about the value to Black Countrymen of the existing association with the north in the joint scale, which many saw as an imposition depressing wages in south Staffordshire. Repeated demonstrations by James Capper that in spite of recent reductions wage levels were considerably higher than in previous depressions did nothing to allay these doubts,[53] and as the twelve month agreement on the Derby scale neared its end the employers' proposal for a new scale with a minimum puddling rate of 8/6 per ton was emphatically rejected. An attempt by Capper and William Aucott to secure its acceptance by reaching agreement with the south

Staffordshire owners on the payment of a premium over scale wages in lieu of northern extras came to nothing, and there were strikes in a number of Black Country towns. With membership of the National Amalgamated Ironworkers in South Staffordshire now less than 1,500 and the ironworkers 'so disorganised and dissatisfied that we cannot give any pledge on their behalf,' Capper and Aucott withdrew from the South Staffordshire Conciliation Board, and at the end of August 1875 it broke up.[54]

In spite of the board's failure Capper and Aucott remained convinced of the value of conciliation machinery and there was a considerable undercurrent of support for their thinking among the main body of Black Country ironworkers. Through the autumn of 1875 meetings were held across the area with a view to reconstructing the board and, as an essential concomitant to this, strengthening the union. At the beginning of December, with wages stabilising and recruitment to the National Amalgamated Ironworkers picking up again, the union leaders approached the employers on the question of re-establishing the board and following a meeting between the two sides at the end of the month Daniel Jones, the employers' secretary, was instructed to draft a scheme for the reconstruction of the conciliation board.[55]

Jones's proposals recognised that the main weakness of the old board was its unrepresentative composition. He suggested that representation on the proposed new board should not be confined to the Ironmasters' Association and

the National Amalgamated Ironworkers, but should include all masters and men prepared to associate themselves with it. On the men's side this involved representatives being elected at each works covered by the board and these then meeting to choose the twelve operative delegates to the board from among their own number. Jones also proposed that the new board have an independent president, not otherwise connected with the iron trade, who would act as an arbitrator at such times as an automatic sliding scale was not in operation; that two paid secretaries, one chosen by each side, be attached to the board; and that executive power to deal with minor disputes be delegated to a small standing committee.[56]

Despite the reluctance of union leaders 'to swallow the bitter pill of meeting non-unionists,' the proposals were in the main favourably received on the men's side and in March 1876 elections were held to choose their twelve representatives on the board.[57] These immediately ran into two difficulties. The first was that William Aucott was apparently rendered ineligible for a position on the board by reason of his firm, the Patent Shaft and Axletree Company, Wednesbury, having declined to join it. Despite the dramatic decline in the strength of the National Amalgamated Ironworkers in the area Aucott and James Capper remained the acknowledged leaders of the Black Country ironworkers, and the possible exclusion of Aucott was a considerable threat to the viability of the

new board. The situationwas temporarily resolved by leaving one vacancy on the men's side of the board pending clarification of the position of those ironworkers whose firms remained outside the board.[58] The second and more serious difficulty was that the long-standing divisions between puddlers and millmen, which had been largely obscured by the delirium of the great boom, were now beginning to re-assert themselves. During the autumn of 1875 a new millmen's organisation, the Finished Iron Rollers Association had been established, and like the former Staffordshire Millmen's Association its members were acutely conscious of their superior status in the trade, feeling that

> they could never be bound by other ironworkers. They were a higher class of the trade, and with all due respect to the others and without any desire to look down on them they felt they must have an association of their own, as they were the cream of the trade, the most intelligent class in it, and for them to be bound together was all the more necessary as no men could be equally necessary in keeping up the interests of their particular industry.'[59]

When the election of the men's delegates left them unrepresented, the millmen insisted that new elections be held and 'that if possible four representatives out of the twelve should be millmen.' In fact only two puddlers could be persuaded to give up their seats to accommodate representatives of the millmen, and the men's side of the board was constituted on this basis.[60]

No action was taken to make any provision for the direct representation of underhands. As on the former

board only the skilled subcontractors were members of the new one. It is difficult to establish with certainty whether underhands participated in the voting for works' representatives, but it seems likely that they did. At this time underhands were certainly being encouraged to join the union, and as union members they would have been eligible to vote for representatives on the old board. With the new board seeking to become more representative it seems unlikely that they would be excluded.

James Capper was appointed operatives' secretary to the board and the other key position on the men's side, that of vice chairman, was duly filled by William Aucott, who appears to have been elected as work's representative by the Patent Shaft men under a revised rule removing the prohibition on participation in the board by employees whose firms were not members. Daniel Jones and J.P. Hunt were appointed employers' secretary and chairman respectively and under the presidency of Joseph Chamberlain, then Mayor of Birmingham, the South Staffordshire Mill and Forge Wages Board began operations in April 1876.[61]

Notes to Chapter Two on pages 495-498.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

IRONWORKERS' TRADE UNIONISM:

UNCERTAIN PROGRESS 1876 - 1916

The fruits of weakness. The new wages board ran into difficulties immediately when no agreement could be reached on the basis for a sliding scale. The owners' proposals effectively involved the men accepting a further wage reduction which they refused to do, on the grounds that wages were already at subsistence level and successive reductions over the past two years had obviously failed to stimulate trade. Chamberlain's award involved a reduction of 9d per ton and 7½%, effective from the week beginning 24 April until 1 October. Announcement of the award was followed almost at once by a partial strike, but this was the result of a misunderstanding over the date from which the new wage levels were to operate and not against the award as such, and the situation was 'speedily adjusted' by James Capper and William Aucott.[1]

Any authority wielded by these two now derived from personality and position on the wages board rather than from the exercise of union writ. Capper's agent's report for August and September 1876 could only state that 'things in the Midland Counties are getting as quiet as the grave, my services being very rarely required. More

lodges have been dissolved, and the funds divided by and amongst those who knew they had no legal or moral right to them.'[2] In an attempt to check the draining away of funds as lodges broke up the General Council of the National Amalgamated Association of Ironworkers revised its rules, so that all property held by constituent lodges belonged to the union and not to the lodges. This move, however, merely served to revive the suspicions of Black Countrymen about the intentions of what many still considered as the 'Gateshead union,' and in spite of their own representatives being signatories to the decision they countered with a proposal that there be two distinct branches of the union, one for south Staffordshire and one for the north of England, each having its own executive and control of its own funds with activities for common purposes being co-ordinated by a central committee. When this suggestion was, inevitably, rejected by the General Council it stimulated further defections from the National Amalgamated Association until by the early months of 1877 there were no more than half a dozen lodges in Staffordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire, and from among 20,000 ironworkers in this area the union could claim 'but little more than 100 compliance members.'[3]

At this point the cause of unionism in the Black Country suffered another blow with the resignation of William Aucott from both the presidency of the National Amalgamated Ironworkers and the vice-chairmanship of the

South Staffordshire Mill and Forge Wages Board. In the 14 years since the formation of the Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain he had been a main pillar of trade unionism among Black Country ironworkers but now, wearied of their self-destroying individualism and inability to submit to the discipline of organisation, he abandoned union activity and the iron industry to become superintendent of Wednesbury Public Baths.[4]

James Capper also left the union shortly afterwards but in rather different circumstances. His contributions ceased in February, when the lodge of which he was a member broke up, and when his term of office as agent expired in May Capper's failure to renew his subscriptions meant that his membership automatically lapsed. By this time Edward Trow had succeeded John Kane as general secretary of the Amalgamated Malleable Ironworkers, Kane having died on 21 March 1876. While a man of great integrity and a highly competent administrator and organiser, Trow lacked both the commanding personality and breadth of vision which had characterised Kane. His opposition to the appointment of district agents at the Sheffield conference in 1872 was typical of his conservative attitudes and his doubts about the wisdom of the decision to appoint agents had been amply confirmed, in his own mind, both by the recent collapse of union membership in south Staffordshire and by Capper's refusal or inability to comply with union rules in carry-

ing out his agent's duties.[5] This failing as an administrator reflected Capper's personality, and the sharp contrast between his extrovert flamboyance and Trow's cautious rectitude was a further source of friction between these two. The consequent reluctance to accept Trow's leadership, particularly in the absence of support from his long standing friend and colleague, William Aucott, was probably the main factor in Capper's decision not to renew his membership of the union.

These developments meant that for all practical purposes the fabric of union organisation among Black Country ironworkers had disappeared completely by the middle of 1877, and through the following year the tightening grip of depression precluded any attempt to revive it.[6] In January the owners claimed, and were awarded, another wage reduction of 7½%, and this was followed in October by a further drop of 5%, reducing puddlers wages to 7/6 per ton, 'barely sufficient to provide for necessities.'[7] The successive wage reductions, amounting to 57½%, which had been imposed since January 1874 were the more serious for the ironworkers because they found it increasingly difficult to impose corresponding reductions on their underhands and boys. Since the middle 1860s a number of factors had combined to reduce the supply of young labour entering the ironworks, notably the operation of Factory and Workshop

regulations, the Education Act of 1870, and the attractions of more congenial work elsewhere.[8] Factory regulations and the provisions of the Education Act could be, and frequently were, evaded but their introduction was by now having a marked effect not only in reducing the supply of boy labour, but also in raising its price which now stood between 55% and 75% above the level of ten years earlier.[9]

The very weakness of the ironworkers' position however, provided their leaders on the wages board with a positive argument for its retention, namely that if the board was abandoned in the depths of depression the men would have suffered all the drawbacks and gained none of the advantages of automatic wage adjustment.[10] This thinking appears to have found a large measure of acceptance among the mass of the ironworkers and stirrings of discontent against the board were notably absent at this time. The only one of any consequence was an attempt to secure a wage advance by suggesting that the alteration in the puddled ton from 2400 lbs to 2240 lbs, required by the Weights and Measures Act from 1 January 1879, become operative without any reduction in wage rates; but the agitation quickly petered out when Chamberlain rejected the proposal, and reduced wages by one-fifteenth to compensate for the shorter ton.[11]

With trade remaining quiet through most of 1879 the opportunity was taken to strengthen the board's organisa-

tion by drawing individual works closer to it. By this time the board's jurisdiction extended beyond the immediate Black Country area into north Staffordshire and Shropshire. Under the reorganisation scheme the area it covered was divided into 12 districts, 10 of which were in the Black Country. Each district was to have its own committee which would ensure that works representatives were properly chosen, that vacancies were filled as necessary and that information circulated by the board reached all works concerned.[12]

Despite this reorganisation the board's main weakness — its unrepresentative character — remained. Many employers and workmen remained outside and others, while nominally members, made no financial contribution. As the south Staffordshire iron trade began to recover from its long depression the consequences of this weakness were dramatically revealed.

When iron prices began to level out towards the end of 1879 the men's side of the wages board applied for a wage increase. This was refused by the employers but Chamberlain awarded a 5% advance, the first advance since July 1874, and in January 1880 another 5% increase raised puddlers' wages to 8/6 per ton. This second award was accompanied by a recommendation that the Board return to sliding scales, and with the upturn of trade the employers felt able to take up Chamberlain's suggestion.[13] Early discussions between the two sides

foundered on the question of the puddlers' premium. There was agreement on the basic relationship of level shillings to pounds sterling and on a three monthly period between wage adjustments, but the owners refused to meet the ironworkers on the matter of the premium. Reference to the new president, Richard Chamberlain, who had succeeded his brother on Joseph becoming President of the Board of Trade earlier in the year, resulted in the puddlers being awarded a premium of 6d per ton, and on this basis the new scale came into operation in July 1880.[14] When the first adjustment of the scale produced a wage reduction of 10% the men's representatives on the wages board appealed for a revision in the basis of the scale. This was rejected by Chamberlain, but he did set a minimum of 7/3 per puddled ton to the scale, with an equivalent 'floor' for millmen, and this prevented a further 2½% reduction taking effect in October 1881, following another fall in iron prices between May and September of that year.[15]

The anomalous behaviour of iron prices in face of the continuing revival of activity produced increasing signs of restlessness among the ironworkers. The operatives' representatives on the wages board and particularly James Capper, as their secretary and chief spokesman, came under fire for accepting the accountant's ascertainment, and when the northern wages board granted an advance of 7½% in February 1882 there was an immediate

demand from the Black Countrymen for a similar increase. Faced with the possibility of losing labour to the north of England and the disruption of production by strike action at a time when a recovery in trade seemed imminent, the employers conceded the men's demand with effect from mid February to 30 April. They also took the opportunity to bring to an end the sliding scale agreement of 18 months earlier, leaving wages once more to be decided by arbitration.[16]

Discussions about the establishment of a new sliding scale began almost immediately. On behalf of the men James Capper sought a more favourable wage basis, involving an effective 10% increase on the one just discontinued, with the familiar justification that while the selling prices of iron in south Staffordshire were higher than in the north the wages of Black Country puddlers were 2½% lower than those of their northern counterparts. The owners maintained that there were no legitimate grounds for any advance on existing wage levels, and not until February 1883 was agreement finally reached on a new scale. By this time the continuing improvement in trade had seen the new president of the South Staffordshire Wages Board, the Birmingham alderman Thomas Avery, grant a 2½% wage increase, and this was incorporated in the new scale, which provided for a premium of 9d per ton above level shillings to pounds sterling in puddlers wages. The 'floor' of 7/3 per ton introduced into the previous

scale by Richard Chamberlain was retained and the new scale became effective from 2 April 1883, to operate for six months certain with termination by either side at one months notice thereafter.[17]

With trade now losing its upward momentum introduction of the new scale involved an immediate wage reduction of 5%, and when this was followed by a further cut of 2½% in July a violent reaction ensued. Inspired by a dissident group from the West Bromwich area an estimated 15,000 ironworkers were persuaded to reject the wages board's authority and come out on strike. The initial demand for a restoration of the 2½% cut was quickly translated into a claim for a 5% advance, accompanied by violence and intimidation. Fourteen strikers were arrested and there was widespread condemnation of the wages board and Capper's leadership of the men's delegation on it. Capper courageously reiterated the advantages of the board and his intention of abiding by its decision, and condemned the strike as 'unjustifiable and dishonourable.'

A ballot among the strikers produced a vote of 759 in favour of staying out for the 6d advance, 852 in favour of returning to work at the old rate, i.e. a restoration of the 3d reduction just imposed and only 95 in favour of returning at the reduction, but with the owners standing firm the strike collapsed almost as quickly as it had flared up. Within a fortnight there

was a widespread resumption of work at the reduction, and though about 3,000 ironworkers in the West Bromwich district stayed out for a further two weeks, by early August all the ironworks of the Black Country were working normally.[18]

The owners immediately took the opportunity to end the sliding scale agreement, so placing wage adjustments once more in the hands of the president of the wages board and when the men's claim for a 7½% advance was rejected by Alderman Avery the strike leaders briefly renewed their challenge to the board's authority. As an essential preliminary to a further attack on the principle of conciliation and sliding scales they sought to establish a new basis of organisation in the Black Country by combining with the north Staffordshire and Lancashire districts of the Amalgamated Malleable Ironworkers to form a new union. A subscription of 6d per week and benefits of 10/- per week strike pay for six months reducing to 5/- per week for a second six months, together with certain welfare payments were envisaged. The move evoked no response in the Black Country and when the north Staffordshire men rejected the proposal the new association was still-born.[19]

These events of the late summer and autumn of 1883 reveal the extent to which the Black Country ironworkers had by this time become the intellectual prisoners of the owners. Despite their reluctance to participate

actively in the wages board a decade of involvement with the owners in the machinery of conciliation, combined with the rapid decline of their industry had seen them implicitly accept the essential principles on which the board was based, that wages must depend on prices and the existence of a community of interest between employers and employed. These beliefs were modified to some extent over the next 30 years but their influence remained strong throughout with consequences which reached far beyond the iron trade. The industrial attitudes of the ironworkers were an important factor in shaping those of other groups of Black Country workers, and in turn these had important implications for political attitudes and allegiance.

The intellectual subjugation of the ironworkers was further revealed by their attitude to the Employers Liability Act of 1880. Though 'in the vast majority of cases employers did not resort to this expedient,' the south Staffordshire ironmasters declared their firm intention of contracting out of the Act. The owners' preference for a voluntary scheme as against what James Capper called 'the uncertain benefits' of the Act was endorsed by the men, and once initial difficulties over the amount of the employers' contribution had been resolved arrangements were put in hand to establish such a scheme.[20]

This involved employers taking out an insurance policy on behalf of themselves and their employees with

the Employers Liability Assurance Corporation. The employers advanced the full amount of the premium and received their employees' share in the form of weekly contributions. The portion of the premium paid by the employers, between 40% and 50%, covered their risks under the Employers' Liability Act and the workmen's contributions provided benefits on the following scale. In cases where there was no liability on the part of the employer disablement pay was at the rate of two-thirds of wages, for 26 weeks, and death benefit amounted to one years wages. If the employer was liable under the Act the corporation would pay, through the employer, the maximum amounts allowed by the Act, namely a sum equivalent to three years wages for fatal accidents, and 'fair compensation' for injuries. The amount of such compensation was a matter for agreement between employers and employed, or failing such agreement for the County Court. To ensure the actuarial viability of the scheme benefits were related to contributions as shown in the table below:

Weekly contribution (pence)	Weekly wage insured (shillings)
½	10
¾	10 - 15
1	15 - 20
1¼	20 - 30
1½	30 - 40
1¾	40 - 50
2	50 upwards

The scheme was strongly commended by James Capper who maintained the ironworkers 'were not called on to sacrifice any principle' in joining it, and that it was 'prudent on their part to accept the opportunity now offered.' Its implementation was approved at a series of mass meetings in the spring of 1882 and by early May about 15,000 south Staffordshire ironworkers were insured under its terms.[21]

This development and the more dramatic events of 1883 served to strengthen the ironworkers' belief in the necessity of maintaining their compact with the owners, but as the iron trade turned sharply down into the deep depression of the mid-1880s mounting unemployment and further falls in wage rates called in question the efficacy of its institutional machinery. A first and purely local initiative to put in hand measures to strengthen this machinery by imposing organisation on the men's side proved abortive; but a second attempt originating from reorganisation of the Amalgamated Malleable Ironworkers proved successful and some important consequences followed from it.

The first impact of this latest downturn in trade was felt in the spring of 1884. With no sliding scale in operation, in April the masters gave notice of their intention to seek a 5% reduction in wages. Their claim was rejected by the men's side of the wages board and accordingly a decision fell to the president. Avery's

award involved a reduction of 2½% and 3d per ton, making the puddling rate 7/3 per ton, the same level that had prevailed from January 1881 to February 1882, and the minimum of the recently discontinued sliding scale.[22]

This development brought into existence another short-lived millmen's union, the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Millmen's Association. Established in June 1884 with headquarters in Bilston, the association sought to guarantee its members against 'those distressing privations consequent upon and inseparable from the constantly recurring fluctuations in the market of labour,' and to protect them 'against the incursions made by employers,'[23] but like previous attempts to organise unions of Black Country millmen it met with little response. A membership of 460 grouped in eight lodges was reported in February 1885,[24] but this appears to have been the peak of the association's strength and its manifest inability to prevent the 'incursions of employers' brought about its complete collapse about 12 months later. The downward trend of prices and employment continued through 1885 and at the end of the year the employers applied to the wages board for a reduction of 10% in wage rates. When Avery granted only half this amount for the first three months of 1886 some employers resorted to undercutting and its failure to take any effective action to protect its members against this resulted in the association breaking up shortly afterwards.[25]

The appearance of undercutting and the rejection, in April 1887, of an appeal for restoration of the 5% cut by the new president of the wages board, Alderman Thomas Martineau, brought to the surface a feeling that had been growing among the ironworkers for some time, that the major cause of the board's weakness and unfair operation was that it was not backed by effective organisation on the men's side. Even the moderate Thomas Piggott, who had become vice-chairman of the board in 1880, was moved to condemn it as a farce.[26]

The situation of the South Staffordshire Board was now similar to that of the north of England Board a few years earlier. Following the abandonment of the Derby scale in July 1875 every proposed change in wage rates in the northern trade had gone to arbitration, there being eight awards in three years. A sliding scale lasted only two years and after further arbitrations during 1882 strikes occurred at 21 northern ironworks. With the existence of the board threatened a ballot was held to establish whether it should continue and when this proved favourable its constitution was strengthened and its name amended to Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, to mark its wider function and new emphasis on negotiation rather than automatic adjustment of wages.

This had been accompanied by parallel efforts to strengthen the Amalgamated Malleable Ironworkers in the area covered by the northern board, but their success

had been shortlived as depression returned to the iron trade, and by 1884 paying membership of the union had fallen to less than 1,200. Amendment of its rules to allow the payment of unemployment benefit saw the union pay out £775 in 1884 and £1,022 in 1885, and with 1886 proving another bad year, early in 1887 the General Council of the Amalgamated Malleable Ironworkers resolved to put in hand measures to secure its complete reorganisation in all iron and steel districts.[27] With confidence in the South Staffordshire Board at a low ebb among Black Country ironworkers, and with recognition of the necessity for union organisation as a precondition of its satisfactory operation now widespread, this move received a cautious welcome in south Staffordshire.

The Associated Iron and Steel Workers of Great Britain.

A preliminary conference to discuss the prospects for reorganisation was held at the Globe Hotel, Birmingham on 5 February 1887. Edward Trow led the northern delegation, and south Staffordshire was represented by James Capper, Thomas Piggott, Benjamin Baldwin, who had been honorary secretary of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Millmen's Association during its short existence, and William Aucott.[28] Aucott was still employed as baths superintendent by Wednesbury Corporation but sensing important developments he agreed to take part in the reorganisation movement and in fact became a central figure in it. The response to a

circular issued from this conference was sufficiently encouraging for a second meeting to proceed with arrangements for a three day national conference, and this opened on 25 April 1887 at the Technical School, Magor Street, Manchester. The 67 delegates represented some 40,000 iron and steel workers in England and Scotland. The south Staffordshire delegation consisted of 25 representatives elected in nine districts, plus James Capper and William Aucott, and with the choice of Aucott as president the conference began.[29]

The first substantial business involved the question of centralisation of funds, and the former differences between south Staffordshire and the north of England on this question at once re-asserted themselves. A motion 'That each lodge retain their own funds subject to the call from the general office,' was seconded by Thomas Piggott, and James Capper was also prominent among those who advocated 'the principle of local self-government.' Edward Trow was the chief spokesman of those in favour of centralisation and a protracted debate ensued. The outcome was a compromise, namely that:

> Each district retain their own funds and elect three trustees in addition to the council member of the district who shall also be a trustee, and the medium through which the money is forwarded on demand to general office funds to be banked in the name of the National Association, no money to be withdrawn without an order signed by all of the above trustees.[30]

This appeared to satisfy both sides and the remainder of the conference business proceeded smoothly. An entrance

fee of 1/-, payable after three months, was agreed and the contribution set at 3d per week. Resolutions in favour of the principles of conciliation and arbitration, and labour representation in Parliament were passed by acclamation, and coercion in Ireland was unanimously condemned. After some discussion it was agreed that the new association should be called the Associated Iron and Steel Workers of Great Britain, and a rules committee was selected to draw up a draft constitution. Edward Trow was appointed general secretary, and as a gesture to the south Staffordshire men he proposed that when James Capper had fully recovered from the effects of a recent illness the two of them act as joint secretaries. This suggestion was unanimously approved and hopeful that old wounds had finally been healed the delegates dispersed.[31]

The affairs of the Amalgamated Malleable Ironworkers were wound up soon afterwards, and its assets transferred to the new union, which by this time was recruiting in the Black Country. The initial response was mixed. 'Fair progress' was reported in Brierley Hill, but it was 'uphill fighting' in West Bromwich, where the big Bromford Works had recently closed. Two lodges were quickly established in Wolverhampton and there were a few hundred members in Smethwick, but only from 'the cream of the trade.' There was a 'gloomy account' of prospects in the Pelsall district, where two out of six works were already in bankruptcy and a third was near to it.[32]

The process of recruitment to the union was accompanied by discussions on the future of the South Staffordshire Mill and Forge Wages Board. At a meeting of the operatives' representatives on the board in Wednesbury on 13 August 1887 Edward Trow gave a clear and forceful lead in favour of taking advantage of the impetus to organisation provided by the formation of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers to reorganise and strengthen the board, and it was unanimously resolved that this be done.[33] Subsequently it was further decided that as a first step in reorganisation the regular payment of contributions to the board be secured by employers deducting from wages the quarterly payments due from those workmen represented on it and forwarding these to the employers' secretary. These proposals found general support among Black Country ironworkers, and when the owners also expressed their desire to see the wages board maintained and strengthened representatives of the two sides met to make the necessary revisions to its constitution.[34]

The new rules left the composition of the board unchanged, with 12 representatives for each side, but the period between ascertainments of wages was reduced from three months to two months. This progressive reduction from a period of six months between wage adjustments, which had been the rule under the first board of 1872-75, to a period of only two months resulted from the recogni-

tion by both sides that the longer the period between ascertainments the more likely were price changes to occur within the period and consequently the more tension was likely to develop between owners and operatives as one side or the other felt that the delay in adjusting wages affected them adversely.

Other changes involved recognition of the fact that most firms in the ironmaking districts of Lancashire, south Yorkshire, and Derbyshire had for some years been following the south Staffordshire board's adjustments of wages. These districts now formally allied themselves with the board and agreed to contribute to its funds, but without being directly represented on it. The subsidiary status of these outer districts was emphasised by their exclusion from the new arrangements for dealing with purely local disputes such as might arise when operatives in a particular works claimed that a process was abnormal and so justified the payment of an 'extra' above scale wages. To adjudicate in such cases a standing committee of eight members, four from each side of the board, was appointed. Its jurisdiction was however confined to south Staffordshire and east Worcestershire, conditions in the more northerly districts being so different as to render the adjustment of disputes by an outside body unacceptable.

Contributions to the board were set at 4d per quarter for tonnage men and time men receiving wages of 3/6 per

day or more, and 2d per quarter for time men receiving less than 3/6 per day. Employers' contributions were fixed at 1/- per quarter for every puddling furnace and 2/- per quarter for every mill furnace. To mark these changes the board was renamed the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board, though in fact very little of its activity touched steelmaking at this time.[35]

At the owners' insistence one important feature of the old board was incorporated into the new one, namely that the operatives' representatives should not be appointed by the union. With recruitment to the Associated Iron and Steel Workers still proceeding only slowly in the Black Country this gave rise to the possibility of an early recurrence of the former situation, where the absence of organisation on the men's side had been a main factor undermining the authority and effectiveness of the old board, and this in turn had been a major obstacle to the recovery of unionism. Edward Trow was quick to point out to the ironworkers that 'it was of no use their appealing to the Wages Board unless they were organised and thus able to support the Board,' but this contention and Trow's insistence that capital and labour were 'natural enemies' were both denied by wages board leaders inured to thinking of an alliance between employers and employed as a substitute for organisation.[36]

Their attitude was, however, modified somewhat by the rejection of the first claim submitted by the iron-

workers in the new board. The 5% reduction of January 1886 had been accompanied by a promise from the owners that it would be restored when the trade depression lifted and by the early months of 1888 there was substantial evidence that this was happening. Board of Trade returns showed that the declared value of pig and puddled iron produced had almost doubled between December 1886 and December 1887, and over the same period the production by value of hoop and sheet iron, which were among the staple products of the south Staffordshire trade, had increased by more than 30%. When the improvement was maintained into 1888 a claim for a 10% wage increase was formulated, but this was strongly resisted by the owners and in June it was rejected by the president of the wages board.[37]

Consequent on this breach of faith by the employers the question of the relationship between the operatives' side of the wages board and the Associated Iron and Steel Workers was the subject of a long discussion at a meeting of operatives' representatives and union officers in Wednesbury on 2 June. At the close it was decided that a sub-committee under the chairmanship of William Aucott, who had now been elected president of the union, should consider the question further before any decision was taken.

The outcome of the sub-committee's deliberations was the following recommendation :

> That the operative members of the Wages Board and the representatives of the Association pledge themselves to in future work harmoniously together and use every effort to induce the men to organise themselves, and that in all questions affecting the interest of the workmen the representatives of the Board and the Association shall meet together and discuss the question at issue, and decide the course of action to be taken.[38]

At a meeting of the General Council of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers on 28 June it was further recommended that, 'in future elections to the Wages Board no person not a compliance member of the association should be elected representative to that Board,' and this was accepted on behalf of the Black Country ironworkers by Samuel Harris, who had succeeded Thomas Piggott as vice-chairman of the wages board following Piggott's death in August 1887.[39]

Characteristically the situation that had arisen between the wages board and the union was epitomised by James Capper. Edward Trow's gesture to him at the Manchester conference had never been returned, and only in face of the developments that had taken place between the union and the wages board in June did Capper take up membership of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers.[40] Any further difficulties that might have arisen between these two were however soon resolved, but in an unfortunate way. In the summer of 1888 Capper suffered a stroke which left him partly paralysed and at the end of the year he resigned his position as operatives' secretary to the wages board. In March 1889 William Aucott was elected

to succeed him, and he held the position until his death in December 1915.

Despite the events of the summer, by the end of 1888 the unrepresentative character of the Midland Wages Board was again causing concern. Only 26 out of more than 90 ironworks in the Black Country area were paying subscriptions to the board, only 35 were connected with the Associated Iron and Steel Workers and 33 were not connected with either board or union.[41] In consequence the principle established only six months earlier, that only those who were members of the union should be elected to the board was already being undermined, and the rule of the board that every representative must be a subscriber was falling into disuse. As a result signs of tension between board members and those they nominally represented, so familiar on the old board, were now beginning to reappear and even at this early stage imperilled the continuation of the new one.[42]

In a further effort to resolve the uncertainty surrounding the board another joint committee of board members and union officers was appointed to consider again the question of how the union could buttress the operatives' side of the board. Their recommendation, made at the end of December, involved further tightening of the code to be followed in the election of operative representatives to the board, as follows:

1. That every works forming part of a lodge at works not subscribing to the Board shall elect one member to act on a joint committee to be called 'The Board's District Committee' and the power of electing the operative members of the Board shall be vested in such committee.

2. That to strengthen the position of the representatives at the Board no workman not a subscriber and representing subscribers to the Board shall be elected to act as operatives representative to the Board.[43]

These proposals appear to have been implemented effectively during 1889 and in subsequent years, and to that extent improved the board's representative character and hence its authority and effectiveness, but its failure to encompass all or even a majority of firms remained a weakness throughout.

With the question of their representation on the new board resolved, the attention of the ironworkers now focussed on the manner of its operation. In October 1888 an application for a 12½% wage increase had been scaled down to only 5% by the president of the board. When a claim for the outstanding 7½% was again scaled down to only 2½%, in January 1889, mounting dissatisfaction with arbitration prompted an approach to the employers to re-establish a sliding scale. Early discussions were inconclusive, as the difference between the two sides on the amount of premium above level shillings to pounds proved too wide, but the situation was eventually resolved in the autumn. The improving trade of 1888 continued through the first half of 1889 but when the

January agreement expired in June the employers conceded a wage advance of only 2½%, and with the ironworkers' resolution fortified by a 'large increase of membership in connection with the Associated Iron and Steel Workers,' by early October a strike was a distinct possibility. The employers then agreed to a premium of 1/9 per ton, and on this basis a new sliding scale came into operation from 28 October 1889.[44]

This success, quickly followed by an increase of 3d per ton and 2½% at the first ascertainment of the new scale and a renewed recruiting drive by the union, brought a further accession of membership to the Associated Iron and Steel Workers and this stood the ironworkers in good stead in April 1890 when the employers revived doubts about the midland trade's ability to compete with the north of England at the existing wage levels.[45] A proposal to reduce the premium to 1/- per ton was strongly opposed by the Associated Iron and Steel Workers' representatives in the union-wages board joint committee, and their influence was strong enough to secure acceptance of a counter proposal by the board that the scale be suspended for two months, during which time a wage reduction of 2½% would apply.[46]

At the end of this period the owners moved for a further 5% reduction, but on resistance from the men this was scaled down to 2½%, William Aucott feeling that 'he could not give way, as the men were already saying very

queer things about the delegates.'[47] These two reductions restored the customary relationship whereby wage levels in the midland district were 6d above those obtaining in the north of England, and for the next two years the southern accountants' two-monthly ascertainments were compared with the northern returns to ensure that the relationship was maintained. The south Staffordshire owners tried to establish this as a permanent arrangement, by reviving proposals for a joint sliding scale during 1891 and 1892 but in face of sustained objections by the northern operatives these came to nothing.[48]

These objections appear to have been rooted in the lingering suspicions of northern ironworkers that, 'as in co-operation so in organisation no absolute dependance (sic) can be put on men in the Midlands,'[49] and the resulting fears that amalgamation of the two scales could undermine the northern wages basis. These fears were in fact belied by the current progress of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers in the Black Country. By the end of 1893 there were 13 union lodges in east Worcestershire with 703 paying members, while the figures for south Staffordshire were 32 and 1,369 respectively. These figures compared favourably with a membership of 1,936 in 20 branches in the north of England,[50] and emboldened by the progress of unionism the Black Country ironworkers took two important initiatives to strengthen other aspects of organisation during the early 1890s.

The first of these involved the establishment of a uniform list in the sheet iron trade. The rapid growth of this trade and the complete absence of organisation within it had given rise by the early 1890s to wide variations in wages between works. This situation gave ample scope for undercutting at times of depression and the consequent widespread resentment among both employers and workmen resulted in the preparation of an agreed list in July 1891. This was accompanied by an agreement between the employers' association and the union similar to that already operating in the nut and bolt trade, where undercutting had been a recurrent problem for two decades. The union agreed to withdraw from the works of any manufacturer who failed to maintain list prices while the employers' association agreed that no other employer would provide such defaulters with sheets.[51]

Through most of the decade this agreement operated satisfactorily, but in 1899 the resumption of downward pressure on wages as the midland trade met increasingly fierce competition from other districts, notably south Wales, gave rise to a short-lived South Staffordshire Iron Sheetmakers' Association, established 'to overthrow the (1891) schedule and obtain reductions in sheet mill wages.' The combined opposition of the wages board and the union proved strong enough to prevent this occurring, and in an attempt to check any further attempts at undercutting the existing informal agreement between

employers and union was placed on an institutional basis with the formation in 1900 of the Welsh Sheet Committee of the Midland Wages Board.[52]

The second initiative involved renewed efforts to resolve the perennial problem of the unrepresentative character of the wages board. In 1893 the arrangement of the previous two years whereby southern wage rates had been related directly to those in the north broke down. During the first two months of 1893 the selling price of south Staffordshire iron was £1/3/3 per ton above the northern price, but at a meeting of the Midland Board at Dudley in April the owners claimed a 2½% wage reduction to maintain comparability with the north. This was rejected by the operatives' side of the board, but Sir Thomas Martineau upheld the employers' claim and the cut became effective for the two months ending 3 June.

An angry meeting of works' delegates resolved that in future their wages should be governed only by the price of local iron, without any reference to the north, and to discontinue the board unless its basis of representation was widened.[53] Subsequently the board memorialised the 69 employers in south Staffordshire and east Worcestershire to ascertain if they were prepared to give positive support to the board by collecting employees' contributions. Sixty-two agreed to do this and the board was enlarged to include one employers'

representative from each firm, with executive authority delegated to a smaller standing committee composed of 12 members from each side.[54]

The ironworkers' objection to being controlled by northern prices was met by the introduction of a new sliding scale. The premium above level shillings to pounds was set at 1/6 per ton and with the price of iron currently standing at £6 per ton this gave a puddling rate of 7/6 per ton. With iron prices in the north depressed, this increased the differential between puddlers' wages in the midlands and those in the north from 6d to 9d per ton, but the chairman of the wages board, Sir Benjamin Hingley, warned that 'they were no longer paramount in South Staffordshire,' and this situation could only be temporary.[55]

As depression returned to the Black Country iron trade in 1894 and 1895 iron prices stagnated and puddlers' wages fell back to 7/3 per ton. This took its toll of union membership and by the end of 1895 it stood at only 400 in east Worcestershire and 1,228 in south Staffordshire, which represented a fall of more than 25% in two years.[56]

Prices failed to recover significantly during 1896 and 1897 and the continuing stagnation of wages brought renewed murmurings of discontent against the board, but these were effectively stilled by the prompt action of union officials and it appears that in response to their efforts membership of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers

rose considerably during 1897.[57]

At this time the Associated Iron and Steel Workers remained the largest and most representative union in the iron and steel industry, but it was now being challenged for this position by John Hodge's vigorous and progressive British Steel Smelters' Association, established in 1886. From its origins in Scotland this association had spread into all iron and steel districts, but had so far made few inroads into the Black Country in spite of the continuing change over to open hearth steel in this area. This may well have been the result of deliberate decision by Hodge, whose drive and organising ability were backed by sound judgement. Even pursued vigorously, his policy of replacing sub-contracting by direct employment would certainly have brought little success in south Staffordshire where sub-contracting remained the established method of organising production, and could well have provoked bitter conflict with the Associated Iron and Steel Workers which remained dominated by the sub-contractors.

Consequently in the Black Country the Steel Smelters pursued a policy of filling gaps left by the Associated Iron and Steel Workers' concentration on wage adjustment in the finished iron trade. Their first branch was established at Wednesbury in June 1889 and in 1896 agreement was reached with the Patent Shaft and Axletree Company on both tonnage and time rates for basic steel

furnaces.[58] A second branch was established at the Earl of Dudley's Round Oak Works at Brierley Hill in September 1894, and twelve months later it was reported to be 'most energetic.'[59] In April 1900 it had 130 members, including not only steel workers but 'all the men connected in any way with the mill.' By this time a third branch had been formed at the Brunswick works in West Bromwich, and at the end of 1900 membership of the three Black Country branches was approaching 250.[60] Further piecemeal gains similar to that achieved with the Patent Shaft and Axletree Company were made over the next decade, until the progress of technical change and resolution of the latent conflict with the Associated Iron and Steel Workers opened the way to more substantial achievements.

The depression of the middle 1890s in the finished iron trade began to lift in the last years of the decade and by the end of 1900 puddling rates had reached 11/3 per ton, the highest level for 25 years.[61] The strong recovery of wages not only alleviated much of the iron-workers' discontent with the wages board, but also revealed that the union's disciplinary powers had been considerably strengthened in recent years. Its ability to restrain 'the hot headed men in the ranks' was a main factor in ensuring that the revival in trade was not disrupted by the action of irresponsible elements seek-ing to take advantage of the rising market and the

accompanying shortage of labour. This in turn brought tacit recognition of the union's growing authority from the owners, with the chairman of the wages board, Sir Benjamin Hingley, going so far as to suggest that 'the influence of the men's organisation might be brought to bear' on the dozen or so firms still outside the Board.[62] In this atmosphere of mutual tolerance the perennial problem of the relationship between midland wage rates and those in the north was temporarily resolved without difficulty. The customary 6d per ton differential was maintained by the operatives foregoing their right to a 2½% wage advance in 1900 and the owners reciprocated by not claiming a similar reduction in 1901.[63]

This harmony was, however, disrupted as depression returned to the midland trade. During the first half of 1902 falling iron prices halved the customary wage differential with the north, and at Wednesbury on 19 July a delegate meeting of ironworkers instructed their representatives on the wages board to secure suspension of the sliding scale.[64] The employers granted a temporary wage increase of 3d per ton to restore the differential, but when depression persisted through 1903 and into 1904 they pressed for its complete abolition. Speaking as union president William Aucott promised that 'some rough work' would follow any attempt the owners might make to carry out this intention, and in July 1904 the General Council of the union called a district

delegate conference to consider the owners' proposal.

The suggestion was unanimously condemned as an attack on a basic principle of more than 30 years standing, and at a further meeting in September delegates resolved to give three months notice to suspend the sliding scale. It was also pointed out at this meeting that some employers were failing to comply with the rules of the wages board by claiming reductions without submitting the required facts to the standing committee, and with a number of employers having recently left the board its continuation was again called in question.[65] Accordingly, early in 1905, all employers were once again circularised as to their willingness to become subscribing members. Twenty seven firms declined to support the board, but 34 works in the immediate south Staffordshire area, three in Shropshire and six in Wales were in favour of it being maintained, and with these including most of the larger firms it was decided that it should continue under revised rules.[66]

Under these rules the vexed question of arranging for the collection of contributions devolved upon the standing committee. The principle of fixed subscriptions was abandoned and it was left to the standing committee to vary the rate of contribution in accordance with the expenses incurred by the board. The board's authority was strengthened by the requirement that neither side could refuse to submit any case of dispute to the board

should the other side require such submission, and to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding the procedures for submission were more tightly drawn.[67] The basis of representation on the men's side remained unchanged, on a works basis, and it was therefore decided to continue the existing arrangement whereby a joint committee of board members and union officials be appointed, 'before which all questions affecting the Board and Association members should be brought previous to their being definitely settled by the operative members of the Board.'[68]

With the continuation of the board assured attention turned to the question of reintroducing the sliding scale. Difficulties again arose over the amount of premium above level shillings to pounds and only in June 1906, twenty one months after its suspension, was the scale finally brought back into operation, with a premium of 2/- per ton.[69] The initial agreement was for two years but this was renewed periodically so that the scale remained in operation to 1914, with adjustments being made as necessary to maintain the customary differential with the north of England.

Satisfaction with the wages basis reflected the return of prosperity to the Black Country iron trade in the last years before the war. Combined with a continuing dearth of puddlers, this raised puddling wages to 10/3 per ton in February 1913, at which time an additional bonus of 6d per ton was granted to compensate for the

fact that 'improved machinery and modern practice had improved the conditions of work to all classes of tonnage men, except puddlers.'[70]

The first part of this period between the latest revision of the wages board's rules and the outbreak of war was a time of tranquility in industrial relations and progress by the union. As prices and wages moved upwards membership of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers in the Black Country recovered somewhat from the decline it had suffered during the years of depressed trade before 1905, and the union's continuing emphasis on conciliation was in line with the thinking of both employers' and operatives' representatives on the wages board, concerned to preserve the fragile prosperity of the still shrinking iron trade. The joint committee of wages board representatives and union officers had little difficulty in resolving problems arising from operatives' claims, and in 1908 the owners publicly acknowledged the union's part in minimising the number of disputes coming before the board.[71]

By this time, however, union progress in the Black Country was threatened by developments elsewhere. Membership of John Hodge's Steel Smelters' Association had risen to 12,300 at the end of 1905, and with accumulated funds of £55,000 it had displaced the Associated Iron and Steel Workers as the largest and wealthiest union in the iron and steel industry.[72] One

important result of the growth in size and influence of the Steel Smelters was that in most steelworks sub-contracting had been replaced by direct labour, but in much of the area covered by the Midland Wages Board where iron still predominated production in both iron and steel firms remained organised on a sub-contract basis. This led to a bitter clash between the Steel Smelters and the Associated Iron and Steel Workers in 1909-10.

In 1909 the Welsh Sheet Committee of the Midland Wages Board re-affirmed an earlier decision 'that in every works connected with the Welsh Committee the tonnage rate men must pay to the day-wage men the scheduled rate of wages and bonus,' thus fixing a definite relation between the tonnage rate and the earnings of underhands. In the same year John Summers and Sons decided to enlarge the steel sheetmaking capacity at their Hawarden Bridge works in Shotton. In these new mills the sheet committee's basis of payment for underhands was adopted, but in the older mills at Shotton underhands' wages remained at the discretion of the sub-contractors.

When it quickly became apparent that underhands' rates in the new mills were considerably higher than those being paid by the sub-contractors elsewhere at Shotton the day wage men in the older mills struck. With no organisation behind it the strike soon collapsed, but the management advised the sub-contractors 'to meet the

men in a fair spirit,' and brought the matter before the sheet committee. The committee decided that the sub-contractors should pay their underhands a bonus to raise their earnings to the level of those working in the new mills, and this decision was endorsed by the Associated Iron and Steel Workers.

On this occasion however the conciliation machinery of the Midland Wages Board failed to work. The sub-contractors at Shotton, who dominated the local branch of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers, refused to comply with the decision. When the union executive took no action the Steel Smelters, who had previously confined their recruiting at Hawarden Bridge to the furnacemen, opened their membership to the day wage men and there was an immediate influx of members. This made the sub-contractors vulnerable by increasing the likelihood of success for any future strike action by the underhands and was quickly followed by attempts by the sub-contractors to intimidate their underhands. Incensed by the encroachment of the Steel Smelters into one of their established areas the Associated Iron and Steel Workers now backed the sub-contractors and the dispute became a power struggle between the two unions.

In November 1909 a threatened strike by the Steel Smelters saw Summers terminate the sub-contract system altogether, and in March 1910 this brought a counter strike by the Associated Iron and Steel Workers who also

arraigned the Steel Smelters before the T.U.C. When a sub-committee of the Congress suggested, half way through the evidence, that the Smelters withdraw from the Shotton mills the union's representatives walked out of the committee claiming that their case had been prejudged, and the situation remained deadlocked until October 1910 when Summers called in G.R. Askwith, the Board of Trade's chief conciliation officer. He secured an agreement between the firm and the two unions, but with prestige now involved further trouble arose over the wording of the notices announcing the decision. The Associated Iron and Steel Workers' claim that the agreement was a victory for them resulted in a strike by the Steel Smelters in December, and only in January 1911 after an intervention by the Steel Ingot Makers' Association and further reference to the Board of Trade was the dispute finally settled.[73]

This protracted struggle had clear implications for the Black Country, where the strength and influence of the Steel Smelters had continued to grow through the first decade of the twentieth century. A fourth branch of the association was established at the Spring Vale Works in Bilston in July 1909, and by the end of 1910 membership of the Steel Smelters in south Staffordshire stood at over 400.[74] The immediate response of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers was to try to strengthen their own organisation and a sustained recruiting drive

was mounted in the Black Country districts. New lodges were established in West Bromwich and Bilston during 1911, and in Darlaston in September 1912, but with prices and wages now levelling out after the improvement of recent years the response generally was poor.[75]

By contrast the Steel Smelters continued to make solid progress, and by the end of 1912 the Round Oak branch alone had more than 400 members. At a meeting of this branch in January 1913 John Hodge repeated his now familiar plea for unity among the various unions in the industry,[76] and with old memories fading, and in the knowledge of what consequences any repetition of the Shotton dispute would bring for the local trade, there were few objections in the Black Country to the proposals put forward by the General Council of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers for a federation of the iron and steel unions. Opinion in other areas was also generally favourable and in June 1913 the Iron and Steel Trades Federation was formed. The secretary and chief executive officer was James Cox, who had succeeded Edward Trow as secretary of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers on Trow's death in 1899.[77]

The Steel Smelters rejected the federation on the grounds that mere federation did not get rid of sectionalism, and over the next three years there were further discussions on the question of achieving unity in the iron and steel industry, until in March 1916 a joint committee of all unions in the industry devised an ingenious new scheme. This involved the formation of a

new union, the British Iron, Steel and Kindred Trades Association (BISAKTA). Existing unions participating in the scheme would in future neither accept new members nor reinstate lapsed ones. All such applicants would join BISAKTA instead. At the same time members of the existing unions would be free to join BISAKTA individually, and this was actively encouraged by the provision of benefits in BISAKTA at least equal to the best paid by any constituent union. The scheme further proposed that all individual unions, including BISAKTA, would affiliate to a new body, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation. This would be a policy making body having an executive committee drawn from the executives of each of the affiliated unions. The Confederation itself was to have no individual members and would not deal with benefits. Only the Confederation would affiliate to the T.U.C. and it alone would conduct negotiations with employers and be responsible for relations with Government Departments.[78]

These proposals were submitted to a General Conference of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers held in Llandudno on 11-15 September 1916, where their adoption was 'strongly recommended' by the General Council, which included W.H. Powis of Walsall and W.H. Dunn of Brierley Hill. The reorganisation scheme was duly approved by the conference by a vote of 44 to 3, and it became operative on 1 January 1917.[79] Its implementation

effectively ended the separate existence of the unions which were absorbed into BISAKTA and in so doing brought to a clear cut end an era of trade unionism in the iron and steel industry.

In the Black Country trade union attitudes in the quarter century following the formation of the Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain in 1863 had been distinguished chiefly by characteristics of insularity and intellectual submissiveness. These attitudes derived from the circumstances surrounding the foundations of unionism and the subsequent rapid decline of the Black Country iron trade. The early conflicts and misunderstandings between the Associated Ironworkers and the National Association had been carried over into the counsels of the National Amalgamated Association, and with the northward shift in the centre of gravity of the iron trade ensuring that union leadership was exercised from the north of England, by the end of the 1870s this had produced a situation in which the Black Country ironworkers had been left largely isolated from their northern colleagues. Together with the rapid decline of the local iron trade this had driven the Black Country men into the arms of the employers and produced a strong commitment to conciliation and sliding scales.

Both insularity and implicit belief in the inviolability of economic laws had been progressively broken down during the lifetime of the Associated Iron

and Steel Workers. This had been the result of the passing of old leaders, notably James Capper, and the challenge of new ideas consequent on the rise of a more progressive rival union in the Steel Smelters. The implications of the challenge of the Steel Smelters for the fragile prosperity of the south Staffordshire iron trade had been clearly revealed by the Hawarden Bridge dispute of 1909-11, and thereafter resistance to change among Black Country ironworkers crumbled rapidly, until by the time of the absorption of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers into the new union structure in 1917 their former distinctive attitudes had been largely eliminated.

These distinctive attitudes had been largely personified in William Aucott. He had been one of the prime movers in the establishment of the Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain and the first South Staffordshire Wages Board. His enduring commitment to conciliation and sliding scales was expressed through his tenure of the position of operatives' secretary to the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board for more than a quarter of a century, and while he did not fully share James Capper's hostile resentment of external influence his industrial attitudes contained a strong element of insularity. At the same time he held national office as president of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers of Great Britain for almost the whole period of its existence and as such acted as a main channel for the

slow spread of new attitudes among Black Country iron-workers. His death, in December 1915, in the midst of the protracted process of union reorganisation, was strongly symbolic of the passing of old ways.

Notes to Chapter Three on pages 499-502.

PART TWO

C H A P T E R F O U R

MINERS' TRADE UNIONISM:

THE ROOTS OF CONFLICT 1863 - 75

The Black Country coalfield. In 1861 the extractive industries of the Black Country employed some 28,000 men, women and children. About 24,000 were coal miners and a further 2,500 were engaged in ironstone mining. The remaining 1,500 or 1,600 were employed in the clay quarries of the south-west corner.[1] These workers were completely unorganised. Such organisation as had been established by the Miners' Association of Great Britain had been swept away with its collapse in the depression of 1847-8, and there is no evidence to indicate the formation in south Staffordshire of local unions, such as those that developed in the coalfields of Yorkshire and Lancashire, during the 1850s.[2]

The Black Country miners were represented at the conference of district associations organised by Alexander Macdonald at Ashton under Lyme in 1858, and some began paying to the 'amalgamated fund' established at that time 'to enable them to watch the course of legislation with respect to the regulation of the mines, and the social improvement of the miners, and the shortening of the hours of labour, and the education of the boys.'[3] This did not, however, give rise to any lasting organisation among Black Country miners. At a

time of depression in the south Staffordshire coalfield much more than the statement of long term objectives was needed to overcome the considerable obstacles to union organisation inherent in the structure of mining in the area.

The first of these was the small scale of production. The accessibility of the ten yard seam meant that over a considerable part of the coalfield it could be worked along the outcrops or in shallow shafts. The consequent 'ease with which men of small capital could engage in the industry' had resulted in the Black Country being dotted with innumerable sinkings of between six and eight feet in diameter and less than 200 yards deep.[4] Colliery workings of less than ten acres were common and those of more than twenty acres comparatively rare. The 400 or so collieries operating in the area each, on average, represented a capital commitment of no more than £3,000, produced about 15,000 tons annually and gave employment to between 60 and 70 men and boys on the bank and in the pit.[5]

The consequences of small scale production for organisation among the miners were two fold. First, by inhibiting the formation of large and stable groups of workers with strong ties of common interest and identity at the workplace, it served to frustrate establishment of the structure of organisation. Second, and perhaps more important, the existence of 'a multitude of small

enterprises on the south Staffordshire coalfield brought with it fierce and unremitting competition. The strong ebb and flow of the business cycle made life for the coalowner a constant battle in which success and disaster alike were always close at hand.'[6] For those employed by the coalowner this was translated into constant downward pressure on wage rates and uncertainty of employment. By producing among the colliers an attitude to the employer as 'a person to whom they owe no consideration,' this compounded in the mines the indiscipline of labour prevalent in the Black Country generally consequent on the turbulence of its economic life at this time. The resulting 'spirit of insubordination' produced a powerful resistance to the discipline of organisation, whether of management or trade union, and was a further check to the growth of unionism among miners.[7]

The second structural factor was the organisation of production on the sub-contract or 'butty' system. This involved

> the workmen being the servants, not of the proprietor or lessee of the colliery, but of a contractor, in Staffordshire familiarly called a butty, who engages with the proprietor of the mine to deliver the coal or ironstone at so much the ton, himself hiring the labourers requisite, using his own horses and supplying all the tools necessary for working the mines.[8]

The mine owner sank the shafts, 'opened out' the work and installed the fixed capital in the pit. This consisted of the engine house, steam engine and pithead gear. He was also responsible for maintaining the rails

in the pit and ensuring its dryness. The butty provided the working capital and recruited the underground workers.

These were designated by different names according to whether they worked in thick coal or thin coal pits. In thick coal pits the hewers were known as 'pikemen,' while the hauliers who conveyed the coal from the pikeman's place to the shaft bottom were 'bandsmen'. Among thin coal miners the terms for hewers and hauliers were 'holers' and 'brushers' or 'loaders' respectively. The term pikeman derived from the method of hewing the thick coal, by 'pillar and stall'. On this method a pillar of coal between eight and ten yards wide was left in the coal face while a distance of about ten yards between pillars was worked. The coal was first undermined at the bottom and the various strata then 'piked' from overhead so that the coal fell to the floor of the pit. To reach the upper layers the pikeman climbed on to a plank suspended by a chain from two ladders. In this precarious position his life could well depend on hewing the 'slip' which might bring down the coal, in sufficient time.[9] As well as being dangerous the pillar and stall method was also extremely wasteful, with about half the coal being left in the pillar. Throughout the life of the Black Country coalfield the use of the alternative 'longwall' method of getting the coal was constantly urged by mining experts but it was never adopted on any scale. The owners usually insisted that the coal be

worked pillar and stall because the larger coal so obtained commanded a higher price.

All underground workers were nominally paid day wages, but the 'day' was a complex one. It could be either a variable length of time, depending on the hardness of the coal and the experience and skill of the collier, or a measure of value. For the hewers a day was the length of time taken to hew a volume of coal measured out each morning by the butty or his deputy, the 'doggy.' This measure of coal was the 'stint.' The hewer was present at the marking out and he could complain at the size of the stint if he wished. In good times when labour was scarce he was sometimes able to secure a reduction in the stint, while in slack times the butty could impose a longer stint. Once the hewer accepted the stint he then put in what time he liked within the eleven hour shift, usually from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. with one hour for meals. On completing his stint he might leave the pit having earned one days pay or he might carry on to hew another quarter or half stint and so earn pay for a day and a quarter or a day and a half. Sometimes when the hewer was working in a favourable place the butty would put him on a fixed rate of a day and a quarter for a full shift but generally the system was one of stint work, and when the pikeman or holer found himself in an abnormal place he was usually able to reach some arrangement to maintain his current average

earnings. Hauliers were similarly paid by the nominal day, so that a good bandsman might be paid a day and a quarter for a full shift. Their daily rate was rather less than that of the hewers.[10]

Wage rates were directly related to the selling price of coal. This was usually varied, both up and down, by one shilling per ton. The corresponding variation in wages was 6d per nominal day for thick coal miners and 3d per day for thin coal miners, so that in times of rising prices and wages the gap between the earnings of thick coal and thin coal miners widened considerably, and conversely. In addition to wages Black Country miners received certain allowances. Their tools were provided and maintained, and they were entitled to two quarts of beer per day and one ton of coal per month, both winter and summer. For this purpose a month was reckoned as 24 full working days, parts of a day not being counted.

There ware also certain welfare provisions. Miners injured at work received 'field pay' from a fund provided by the owner. In some cases the 'field fund' was supplemented by deductions of 4d or 6d per week from the miners' wages. In the early 1860s field pay varied between 2/6 and 6/- per week, this sometimes being supplemented by a 'gathering,' or weekly payment from fellow-workers. When miners were killed in the pit their widows were supposed to receive a pension and free coal for life or until they remarried, subject to the pit continuing to draw coal and remaining in the same hands. The amount

of the pension varied between 1/6 and 5/- per week in the early sixties, and in practice usually ceased after about a year.[11]

The butties were paid by the owners an agreed price per ton of coal raised, this being the 'charter.' Their earnings thus depended on the difference between this price and the amount per ton expended in getting the coal. With adjustments in the charter being made in line with changes in the price of coal the butties could only maintain or increase their earnings by keeping labour costs constant or reducing them. Since wage rates were also set by the coalowners this involved butties either manipulating the hours of labour or increasing the intensity of work.

Manipulating the hours of labour involved taking advantage of the existence of surplus labour to overstock the pits. The resulting competition among the colliers for full time, particularly in periods of depression enabled the butties to drive them to work during meal times or beyond normal hours. It also enabled butties to take advantage of the established local practice whereby the calculation of miners' pay was based on a minimum period of a quarter day. With the full day reckoned from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. would be a quarter day, 6 a.m. to 12 noon a half day, and so on. Thus if miners worked from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. or 11 a.m. they would receive only a quarter day's pay, if

they worked from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. they would receive only a half day's pay. Sometimes this practice was carried further and work would be stopped before the miners had made the first quarter day, so that they would receive nothing for the coal raised in that time. In pits over-stocked with labour butties could engage in these practices without fear of retaliatory strike action.[12]

The existence of surplus labour also enabled butties to increase the intensity of work with little fear of reprisal. This was achieved in two ways. First, the butties could lay down the number of 'skips' of coal to be raised in a day. If this number was not reached the butties could extract more hours work from the miners, for which they would not be paid, or reduce their pay proportionately. Second, butties could form a 'model team' of the best workers, paying them a little more, and make their performance the standard by which the performance of other teams was measured. Failure to match the performance of the model team would then be considered as a failure to complete a full day's work and involve a corresponding reduction in pay.

The operation of the sub-contract system in the coal industry was thus quite different from its operation in the finished iron trade. In the iron trade the sub-contractors were essentially key production workers with no managerial function other than that of recruiting and paying their underhands. Their industrial position was

clearly distinguished from that of management and this gave rise to the growth of trade unionism among the sub-contractors who, in their own eyes and those of the owners, were clearly 'workmen.' In the mines the operation of the butty system was such as to impose on the sub-contractors a considerable range of managerial functions, indicated above, and so blur the distinction between them and the owners.

In addition the position of butties vis-a-vis the coalowners was very weak. The fact that they had to pay wage rates determined by the owners had particularly unfortunate consequences. While compelled to bear a substantial proportion of any losses resulting from disputes over wages the butties had no control over the causes of such disputes nor over the terms of their settlement. Whatever the outcome the butties suffered. If the colliers obtained a wage increase their charter price went up only by sufficient to cover the cost of the increase. If the owners enforced a reduction the charter was reduced accordingly. In either case the butties had overhead costs to bear during the stoppage, and the cost of re-starting work in a deteriorated pit. Together with wide variations in the terms of contract and physical conditions from pit to pit, again by contrast with the sub-contractors in the finished iron trade and especially the puddlers, this anomalous relationship between masters and butties and the transfer to the

butties of some managerial functions effectively prevented any growth of union organisation among the sub-contractors in the pits.

This in turn had important consequences for trade unionism among the miners. With the stimulus to self interest among the butties unchecked by organisation, their powers of exploitation were given full rein. Deriving in the main from overstocking pits with labour these powers could be wielded most effectively at times of depression and their divisive effects were a powerful check to any appearance of organisation among miners at such times. In periods of rising prosperity the fierce individualism among miners engendered by their experience in slack times, together with the 'flooding' of the pits by temporary labour, in turn tended to stifle the growth of unionism at these times.

Divisions among the miners engendered by the butty system were enhanced by the conflicting interests of Black Country coalowners. These could be divided into two groups; those whose interests were predominantly in thick coal and who also owned ironworks in which most of their own coal output was consumed, and those whose interests lay mainly in supplying the manufacturing industries and domestic markets of Birmingham and the Black Country. The first group consisted in the main of the larger owners whose prime concern was to keep down the production cost of iron. The second group included

the smaller owners, normally operating on very small margins.

The significance of this division among the owners for organisation among their colliers emerged clearly whenever the men took strike action. This was almost invariably precipitated by the attempts of the larger owners to reduce wages following a fall in the price of iron. Such falls were not necessarily accompanied by decline in local domestic markets or in the demand from manufacturing industry, and while these markets remained buoyant there was no necessity to reduce the wages of the miners engaged in supplying them. A situation therefore sometimes arose in which the larger owners were actively seeking to impose reductions in wages while the smaller mineowners were much less strongly committed to such action.[13]

On these occasions a high proportion of the small owners would usually come to an arrangement with their colliers whereby the men remained at work during the dispute on the understanding that when it was over both sides would observe the terms of settlement. As a result it was not uncommon for one section of Black Country miners to be engaged in strike action while others were working double shifts in an attempt to supply the iron-works as well as domestic markets and manufacturing industry. At such times those remaining at work frequently levied themselves substantial sums in the

early stages of a strike, but the lack of 'force and cohesion' among the miners[14] meant that both the collection and distribution of money was haphazard and the strikers would quickly have to fall back on casual earnings from the land or from nail and chainmaking while their fellow colliers enjoyed three or four months of relative prosperity. This final divisive consequence of the structure of coal mining in south Staffordshire was a further major obstacle to union organisation among miners.

The factors inhibiting the growth of unionism were thus considerably stronger in mining than in the finished iron trade, and it required the example of the ironworkers to stimulate the establishment of organisation among the miners. The success of the four month strike by iron puddlers in 1863, as well as giving rise to the Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain and breaking the established price-wage relationship in the iron trade, also broke the customary pattern whereby the wage rates of ironworkers and miners rose and fell together.[15]

When the successive advances of 1/- per ton conceded to puddlers in August and September 1863 were not accompanied by the usual increases of 6d per day in colliers' wages, a delegation from the North Staffordshire and North Wales Miners' Association to the Bilston miners condemned

> the unfair manner in which the miners had been treated by the ironmasters in the settlement of their late differences ----- for the same rule which gave the puddler an advance of 1/- per ton in respect of the iron he made

> entitled the collier to a rise of 6d per day in respect of the coal which he raised.[16]

A mass meeting responded by resolving to open a branch of the association in Bilston, and this was followed almost at once by the owners granting the increase. With the resumption of full activity in the iron trade stimulating the demand for coal and pushing prices higher this was quickly followed by a second increase of 6d per day, making thick coal miners' wages 5/- per day and the highest for 15 years.[17] Consequent on this sharp upturn in activity a shortage of labour amounting to 'a kind of social revolution in this district' temporarily eliminated competition for jobs,[18] and as in the iron trade the coincidence of prosperity with the foundation of unionism stimulated a rapid spread of organisation. Through the autumn miners' associations were formed all across the coalfield and at the National Conference convened by the south Yorkshire miners in Leeds on 9-13 November five Black Country district organisations were represented by 13 delegates.[19]

The Great Amalgamations. The decision of this conference to establish a central organisation, the Miners' National Association, under the presidency of Alexander Macdonald appears to have given a further stimulus to the newly established south Staffordshire unions, and at the first six-monthly conference of the National Association in May 1864 the balance sheet showed that the Black Country districts' contributions of £109/11/7d were the second

largest component in a total income of £489/16/8½d.[20]

By this time the sharp upturn of activity in the Black Country trade was losing momentum and in June the coalowners, meeting in Dudley, gave notice of a wage reduction of 6d per day commensurate with a fall of 1/- per ton in the price of coal. The miners' associations responded with strike notices and on the expiry of these, in mid-July, the strike began. In districts to the south-west of the central ridge ('west of Dudley') there was an immediate and almost complete stoppage, but in the north-east sector of the coalfield ('east of Dudley') many thick-coal miners continued at work.[21] The initial reluctance of the colliers east of Dudley to support the strike provoked attempts at intimidation by strikers, but these were successfully suppressed by the police and the militants had to be content with peaceful demonstrations to convince the uncommitted. In one such demonstration over 8,000 miners marched from Holly Hall, Pensnett and Netherton to West Bromwich in an attempt to 'draw out' their fellows in the north-east sector, but this met with little success.

The uncertain response to the strike call and awareness of their limited resources counselled caution. At a strike meeting in Dudley it was argued that the masters

> were naturally in possession of more authentic facts and were better qualified than the men to place the question on its real bearings and (the men) should be ready to resume work on being fairly convinced that the masters could not afford to give the old rate.[22]

In this spirit a deputation of miners, led by Levi Brittain of Dudley, William Breakwell of Brierley Hill and Thomas Griffiths of West Bromwich met the owners at Stourbridge on 3 September. The outcome of the meeting was inconclusive and the attitude of the colliers began to harden.[23] Support for the strike grew in the north-east sector of the coalfield and outbreaks of violence became widespread. Incendiary attacks were made on the homes of blacklegs and butties, and on the Congreaves Works of the New British Iron Company. Relations between miners and police became very strained, and some fierce clashes led to the military being called into the area. By this time the failure to spread the strike beyond the Black Country and the lack of response to appeals for financial support were beginning to undermine the strikers' resolve.[24] A drift back to work began in mid-October and by early November nearly all the miners west of Dudley were back at work. In West Bromwich and Oldbury, where initial support for the strike had been only lukewarm the men voted to stay out, and here the strike dragged on for almost another month, but by mid-December the whole coalfield was working normally, at the reduced wage of 4/6 per day.

This strike had important and lasting consequences for the relationship of the local miners' organisations with the National Association. Alexander Macdonald's doubts about its wisdom and timing were interpreted by

the strike leaders as outright opposition. Their smouldering discontent with Macdonald's leadership was fanned into a flame by John Towers, the bitterly anti-Macdonald editor of the Miner and Workman's Advocate[25] and south Staffordshire men formed the nucleus of the 'Miner faction' who attended the Manchester conference of the National Association in November 1864 with the clear intention of overturning the leadership or destroying the Association.

The 'confused and turbulent' proceedings at the conference delayed the election of officers until the fourth day, when Macdonald was opposed for the presidency by Thomas Kimberley, of the West Bromwich Association. When the voting resulted in a tie, 19-19, John Normansell of north Yorkshire gave his chairman's casting vote in favour of Macdonald. Immediately seven of the eight south Staffordshire delegates withdrew from the conference, together with the three from South Wales, those from Durham and some scattered individuals from other districts.[26] They joined Towers and William Whitehorn, the proprietor of the Miner and Workman's Advocate, in a nearby hotel and convened their own conference.

Here they decided to call themselves the National Association of Practical Miners. Thomas Kimberley was duly elected president and Levi Brittain a member of the Executive Council. Their rules, published a week later, reflected the resentment of the Black Country men at the

lack of support from other districts for their strike. The main difference from the rules of the National Association was that in disputes the Council could, at its discretion, 'lay a levy upon the members in every district to raise funds to pay each member 10/- per week so long as such disputes may continue.'

The Practical Miners now set out to consolidate and extend their organisation, and at a delegate conference in Chesterfield on 26-29 December 1864 Kimberley and Brittain were appointed 'to tour the whole of the mining districts in order to bring about a general organisation.'[27] This move, however, brought little success even in those areas where opposition to Macdonald and the National Association had been strongest. At a conference in Durham in June 1865 only five delegates, representing 287 members, were present and it was stated that south Staffordshire and east Worcestershire had contributed nothing to the funds.[28] On 22 July the Miner and Workman's Advocate reported that it had

> no knowledge of the activities of Kimberley and his south Staffordshire colleague Levi Brittain, who should, according to conference resolution, have been touring the mining districts on behalf of the Association and reporting week by week to the Miner and Workman's Advocate.

By this time the Practical Miners were also torn by internal dissension. At the May Council meeting the secretary and treasurer had resigned and at Durham both were accused of 'negligence.'[29] Thomas Griffiths of

West Bromwich took over as treasurer, but the finances and organisation of the Practical Miners were now weak beyond redemption and it simply faded away.

The National Association meanwhile had remained active and a number of districts which had seceded drifted back. The Black Country associations, however, stood aloof and in an attempt to win them back the National held its conference of June 1865 in Tipton. In connection with the conference public meetings were held

> for the purpose of explaining the principles and objects of the National Association, and to enlighten the miners of that extensive coal district as to the real good that is sought to be conferred upon them by members of that extensive body.[30]

These meetings were singularly unsuccessful, and the 'impudence and ignorance' of the Council of the National Association in seeking to recruit in the Black Country less than a year after insisting that the local associations 'were not sufficiently amalgamated' to claim strike pay served only to transform strongly held doubts about the value of affiliation to the National Association into open hostility to it.[31]

The events of 1864 and 1865 badly undermined confidence in trade unionism among the Black Country miners. Over the next few years some district associations disappeared completely and others contracted to mere token organisations. This decline was particularly evident in the north-east sector of the coalfield, and at the end

of 1869 when the beginnings of the great coal and iron boom sparked off a revival of union activity this began first west of Dudley.

In the last months of 1869 and the first months of 1870 a number of meetings were held at various centres in the south-west sector, to formulate a common policy and to agree on demands to be placed before the owners.[32] Revival east of Dudley came later, only beginning in the late summer of 1871, and here it was inspired not by local initiative as it had been in the south-west but by the Amalgamated Association of Miners.

This organisation had been formed in 1869 under the presidency of Thomas Halliday of Little Lever, near Bolton. Like the Practical Miners it was a breakaway from the National Association, but its relations with the National were quite different from those of the Practical Miners. The two bodies co-operated in seeking more stringent mines regulations and the Amalgamated was eventually re-absorbed by the parent association. The difference between them was really one of emphasis. The National was concerned mainly to act as a political pressure group, seeking to improve mining conditions through tighter legislation rather than by serving as 'a national strike committee.' The Amalgamated placed greater emphasis on concerted industrial action and national support in local disputes, and it was in pursuit of this strategy that it was first drawn to extend its organisa-

tion into south Staffordshire.

By the early 1870s the Black Country had for some years been notorious in other mining areas as a source of blackleg labour. This reputation was due mainly to the activities of Paul Roper, of Bilston, who earned a substantial income by acting as agent for coal masters needing such labour at times of strikes by their own colliers. When a strike began in south Wales in the summer of 1871 William Brown and Samuel Sambrookes of the north Staffordshire district of the Amalgamated Association hurried down to the Black Country with the specific intention of frustrating Roper by re-organising defunct and moribund lodges.[33] Finding that recovery was already proceeding west of Dudley they concentrated their efforts in the north-east sector of the coalfield and so began the revival of organisation in this part of the Black Country.

A lodge of the north Staffordshire district of the Amalgamated was established in Darlaston on 23 September 1871 and this was followed by a second, in Willenhall, on 11 December. These two lodges formed the nucleus of the south Staffordshire or Darlaston district of the Amalgamated Association which was formed shortly afterwards, with an initial membership of about 340.[34] The reaction of the West Bromwich Association to this development was typical of the intense local particularism of Black Country miners. The West Bromwich men insisted

that their association retain its own identity[35] and remain separate from the new organisation, and even after the West Bromwich Association affiliated to the Amalgamated in 1872 relations between the two districts were always suspicious.

All attempts by the Amalgamated to extend its organisation across the central ridge into the south-west sector of the coalfield came to nothing. The Amalgamated's policies required the compulsory payment of levies by affiliated organisations and this threatened, or was imagined to threaten, some encroachment on the autonomy of those associations west of Dudley whose revival had been brought about by local officials prior to the Amalgamated Association establishing itself in the Black Country. In a letter to the Dudley Herald Levi Brittain, now the paid agent of the Dudley miners, after accusing William Brown of holding out 'false hopes of 10/- a week' strike pay stated flatly that 'it is of no use to ask the men of this country to pay levies with men of other countries for they will not. Then let all be done on the voluntary principle.' Brown responded by quoting the example of the lodge in Darlaston which was already paying levies, and the assertion that 'the Amalgamated will grow and prosper in spite of all Mr. Levi Brittain can do or say.'[36]

This differing attitude to the payment of levies and the accompanying personal animosity was, however,

merely the superficial expression of a much deeper and more significant difference that was now developing between the miners of the south-west sector and those in the north-east. As the great coal and iron boom moved to its peak it revealed quite clearly a different 'temper' between the miners' organisations in the two sectors and a different attitude to the exercise of power falling to the miners consequent on its occurrence.

The economic leverage that the unprecedented demand for coal gave to the Black Country miners was such that in the eighteen months ending in May 1873 the owners were forced to concede an eight hour working day and an increase in day rates amounting to almost 40%. At every stage in this wages and hours movement the initiative was taken by the associations west of Dudley. The first steps were taken in December 1871. At a conference called by the Dudley Association on 11 December the miners of the south-west sector resolved to seek a two hour reduction in the existing eleven hour working day and a corresponding reduction in the stint for those miners who were paid on this basis. These aims were then endorsed by the miners east of Dudley at a meeting in Hill Top, West Bromwich.[37]

The demand was rejected by the owners on the grounds that most colliers were not currently working a full week, and that the claim resulted from agitation by outsiders. The men responded with a fortnight's notice of

strike action and on the expiry of this the miners of the south-west sector duly came out. East of Dudley there was only a partial response. Miners struck work in Wolverhampton and a few other places, but not over the sector as a whole.[38] The owners, however, were in no position to exploit this division between the miners of the two sectors. With prices of iron and coal now rising rapidly they could not afford a strike of any length. They quickly offered a 58 hour week and a one-sixth reduction in the pikeman's stint, and on this basis the miners resumed work.[39]

With the boom retaining its impetus agitation for a nine hour day (a 54 hour week) was soon renewed, coupled with a demand for a further one-sixth reduction in the pikeman's stint. Again the Dudley Miners' Association gave the lead and again the demand was conceded after only token resistance by the coalowners, with the nine hour day becoming effective from 18 March 1872. This further success and the continuing growth in membership encouraged the unions to make new demands and in June 1872 the owners were memorialised for an 8 hour working day and a one-ninth reduction in the stint.[40] The demand was again conceded without any stoppage of work, and over the next months further concessions of a minor nature were granted by the owners so that by May 1873 when the last advance of this period was secured day rates were 37½% above the level of 1871, about 27%

of this being attributable to the successive reductions in the working day.[41]

The clear lead given by the Dudley Miners' Association to this strong movement for higher wages and shorter hours earned Levi Brittain the reputation of being 'the Mars of the malcontents,' and his militancy stands in sharp contrast to the eagerness of Thomas Griffiths, now the paid agent to the West Bromwich Miners' Association, to see a board of arbitration and conciliation established for the south Staffordshire coal trade.[42]

These findings support those of Alan Fox, that at this time, 'trade union attitudes "east of Dudley" tended to be conciliatory, co-operative and amicable. Trade union attitudes "west of Dudley" tended to be belligerent, non-co-operative and suspicious.' Fox's explanation of these divergent attitudes, however, is not convincing. This suggests that pre-existing sub-regional differences between the south-west and north-east sectors crystallised into differing industrial attitudes among the miners in the two areas because a different temper of leadership moulded the outlook and policies of the various district organisations. This leadership was exercised primarily by the full time agents who:

> quickly came to dominate their respective district organisations and to mould the attitudes of miners within them. ----- The dominant figures ----- were Levi Brittain, agent for the Dudley and district miners; W. Breakwell, agent for the Brierley Hill, Pensnett and the Gornals districts; and T. Griffiths, agent for the West Bromwich,

> Oldbury, Tipton and Coseley districts. The difference of approach between Brittain and Breakwell (of the south-west sector) on the one hand, and Griffiths (of the north-east sector) on the other, are very marked.[43]

Superficially this explanation appears adequate enough. Dudley and Brierley Hill were militant districts, West Bromwich was conciliatory; they had different leaders; therefore leadership was the factor accounting for the difference in attitude. Closer examination, however, reveals it to be both inadequately grounded in fact and altogether too simpliste to explain a complex situation.

First, Fox appears unaware of the fact that Levi Brittain and Thomas Griffiths were both officials of the Practical Miners, which would appear to indicate that their temper and industrial attitudes were basically similar rather than in 'very marked' contrast.

Second, Fox's account of the relationship between the agents and their associations is quite mistaken. The assertion that the agents 'came to dominate their respective district organisations' seems to be based on the belief that.

> appointment as an agent was usually an appointment for life — in fact if not officially. None of the agents who shaped the attitudes and policies of the Black Country miners in the first half of the period (i.e. 1860 to 1880) occupied his post for less than twenty years.

Among colliers who 'showed themselves very vulnerable to the most immediate influence' this security of tenure and the resulting control of the district organisation by the agents, it is maintained, enabled them to impose

their views and attitudes on those they led.[44] This is not the case. Appointment as a district agent was not in fact an appointment for life; none of the three leading agents held his position for anything like twenty years and two of them were actually removed from office by their associations.

It is impossible to date precisely the appointments of Brittain, Breakwell and Griffiths as full time agents, but it certainly does not seem to be the case, as Fox appears to think, that this followed almost immediately on the formation of district associations in 1863 and 1864. At the time of the 1864 strike Levi Brittain was still specifically described as a working miner and neither were Breakwell and Griffiths distinguished as agents from among the deputation of working miners which met the owners at this time.[45] It seems unlikely that the sharp decline of organisation following the failure of the 1864 strike and the attendant financial difficulties would allow the appointment of full time agents, and it is probable that these were not appointed until the beginning of the great boom of the late 1860s and early 1870s brought with it renewed prosperity and the revival of unionism.

Whatever the exact date of his appointment William Breakwell's tenure of office as agent for the Brierley Hill district was terminated in April 1870 when he was dismissed by the executive council of the association, though whether on grounds of policy or personality is not clear.[46]

Breakwell thus clearly did not dominate the Brierley Hill Association and was agent for at most six years. His dismissal split the association and a breakaway group formed a new association centred on Old Hill and Blackheath, with Breakwell as agent. His successor in Brierley Hill was David Watts, who appears to have held office until the end of the 1870s. Very little is known of either Breakwell or Watts, but significantly the sudden change of leadership was not accompanied by any discernible change of attitude on the part of the Brierley Hill Association. Its characteristic west of Dudley temper remained evident throughout the 1870s.

It can be argued that this was so because Breakwell and Watts exercised a similar militant leadership. It can be further argued in support of Fox's hypothesis that Breakwell's influence was responsible for shaping the belligerent attitude of the Old Hill Miners' Association which was then further developed by his successor, Benjamin Winwood, and became so important for the development of mining trade unionism in the 1880s and 1890s.[47] Fox himself does not offer this argument because he is not aware of the events involving Breakwell and the Brierley Hill and Old Hill Associations in April 1870 and is under the misapprehension that Breakwell remained the Brierley Hill agent until the early 1880s, but because it requires an unacceptably large element of coincidence to sustain it any argument on these lines serves only to

weaken the hypothesis further. The requirement that the attitudes of an organisation deriving essentially from their imposition by a single leader were then sustained by the fortuitous appearance of another leader of similar outlook and temparament, and on two separate occasions, stretches coincidence a long way. When the hypothesis requires coincidence to sustain it for a third time, and again at variance with the facts, it can be discarded.

When the south Staffordshire district of the Amalgamated Association was formed at the end of 1871 the existing West Bromwich Association remained outside and retained its identity as a separate organisation. The South Staffordshire Association thus never came under the influence of Thomas Griffiths's leadership but through the 1870s its conciliatory and co-operative attitude was indistinguishable from that of West Bromwich and other districts east of Dudley.

Further, it is not the case that Griffiths dominated the West Bromwich Association any more than William Breakwell controlled the Brierley Hill Association. Griffiths's tenure of office in West Bromwich was considerably longer than that of Breakwell in Brierley Hill, but there was always a strong undercurrent of opposition to his leadership and he did not simply 'withdraw from the scene,' as Fox states. He was eventually dismissed by the West Bromwich Association and in December 1880 brought an unsuccessful County Court action for wrongful

dismissal against the association.[48] The grounds for Griffiths's dismissal cannot be established with certainty, but his decision to stand as a candidate for the West Bromwich School Board in 1877 provoked a lot of opposition within the association and this may have been the decisive factor.[49] He was succeeded as agent by Henry Barnes and leadership of the West Bromwich Association through the 1880s appears to have been on a collective basis, with its conciliatory temper, expressed in active commitment to sliding scales, strongly maintained.

With the leadership hypothesis being based on a misapprehension of fact and consequently requiring an unacceptable succession of historical coincidences to sustain it, an alternative explanation, of general applicability, of the differing attitudes exhibited by miners east and west of Dudley is clearly required. This can be attempted by postulating that differences in leadership, rather than being exogeneous, were the response to differences in the temper and attitude of those led. An analysis of the difference between the miners of the south-west sector and those of the north-east can then be attempted in terms of two factors producing a different group psychology in the two sectors.

The first of these was discussed in Chapter One, namely the shift in the relative importance of the two sectors of the Black Country coalfield. From the middle 1860s, as seams were exhausted and its mines became

increasingly subject to flooding, the north-east sector progressively lost ground to the south-west sector which continued to expand for a further decade. The continuing expansion and profitability of mining operations in the south-west sector meant that in the event of any stoppage of work occurring the miners of this sector were in a much stronger position vis-a-vis the owners than their fellows in the north-east sector, for two reasons. By reason of their wider profit margins the losses incurred by the owners in the south-west sector were likely to be greater than those suffered by owners in the north-east sector; and the miners of the south-west sector were not yet subject to the threat of contraction in the labour market being accelerated by pit closures consequent on a stoppage.

Awareness of their greater vulnerability vis-a-vis the owners could have been a main factor restraining the eagerness of miners east of Dudley to exploit their strength at the height of the boom, and in their willingness to seek an accommodation with the owners when the downward trend of production and employment was resumed after 1873. The parallel between the situation of the miners of the north-east sector and their response to it, and that of the general body of Black Country ironworkers, is compelling and in turn it suggests the second factor.

By the early 1870s the iron trade of the Black Country was heavily concentrated east of Dudley. In 1873

124 of the area's 171 blast furnaces and 1,633 of its 2,160 puddling furnaces were located east of the central ridge.[50] From the end of the 1860s there was a strong movement within the iron industry towards establishing industrial relations on a basis of conciliation and sliding scales, and this was finally achieved with the formation of the South Staffordshire Iron Trade Board in 1872. On the other hand, by the middle 1860s and increasingly thereafter, the domestic trades of the Black Country were concentrated in the small towns and industrial villages west of Dudley. The main industrial weapon of the operatives in these trades was the restriction of output strike. The contrasting attitudes to the problem of wage settlement among their fellow working men could have been the second influence conditioning the different attitudes of miners east and west of Dudley.

The consequences of the division between miners of the north-east and south-west sectors did not become fully evident for another decade. Indeed in the heady atmosphere of 1872-3, generated by the onward rush of the great boom and the attendant mushroom growth of union membership, it hardly seemed to matter. By the middle of 1873 membership of the Darlaston Association had grown from its initial 340 of December 1871 to more than 5500, and it was in a strong enough financial position to lend more than £3,400 to the South Wales districts of the Amalgamated Association. Less than a year later membership had

reached 6,596 grouped in 34 Lodges.[51] Membership of the West Bromwich Association passed 4,000 during 1873, and just beyond the northern edge of the Black Country membership of the Cannock district of the Amalgamated Association reached 2,000.[52]

The euphoria was such that it even overcame hostility to Macdonald and the National Association. During 1873 the Dudley and Brierley Hill Associations re-affiliated to the National and at the time of the Leeds conference in November membership of the Dudley Association stood at 3,900. The other associations of the south-west sector were of necessity smaller. Membership of the Brierley Hill Association was only 500 at this time and with 760 members the Wordsley Association was only slightly larger, but both these figures represented increases over previous years.[53]

These developments alarmed the butties. The only benefit they had obtained from the great boom was an increase of one-ninth in the charter, and in addition to being squeezed by the rise in miners' wages they saw their disciplinary powers being undermined by the growing strength of the unions and the increasingly acute labour shortage. In an attempt to reassert some degree of control, in March 1873 the butties sought to introduce the 'discharge note rule' into the colliers' conditions of employment. The proposed rule required that no miner could obtain employment 'unless he produces a discharge

note from his last employer,' and had it become operative it would in effect have given the butties power to prevent any miner working in any of the pits of the district.[54] Realisation of its implications brought a storm of protest from all the district unions and in face of this the attempt to introduce it was abandoned. Perhaps even more than the success of the wages and hours movement this episode is indicative of the position of strength achieved by the Black Country miners' unions at the height of the great boom.

Even now, however, only about half the miners in the area were organised and among many of these opportunism rather than any commitment to ideals of unity and solidarity was the main motivation behind union membership. As boom turned into depression it revealed clearly the insecure foundations of unionism and during 1874-5 membership collapsed as spectacularly as it had grown over the previous three years.

The effects of weakening prices in the iron trade which became apparent towards the end of 1873 were quickly transmitted to the coal industry, and in March 1874 the coalowners announced a reduction of 3/- per ton in the price of thick coal, to be accompanied by a reduction of 1/- per day and 9d per day in the wages of thick coal and thin coal miners respectively.[55] While accepting the principle that coal prices and wages should move together the colliers objected to the size of the proposed reduction, which amounted to about 18% on the

current wage levels of 5/6 per day (thick coal) and 4/- per day (thin coal). Prices had far outstripped wages during the late boom and the miners declared that they 'would only submit to a reduction in their wages in proportion as they had shared in the advance.'[56]

A conference of owners and men to discuss possible reference of their differences to arbitration proved abortive and when the owners also refused to recognise the miners' agents the men retaliated with strike notices.[57] On this occasion the miners could embark on strike action with much more confidence then they had done ten years earlier. Union organisation was much stronger, both nationally and locally, considerable financial resources were available and they had before them examples of successful strikes in other areas, such as that by the South Wales miners in 1871.

The early stages of the strike followed the familiar Black Country pattern with the miners continuing at work in those pits whose owners, generally the smaller men, were prepared to pay the rate prevailing before the announcement of the reduction. In the first weeks some 1,600 of the Dudley Association's members remained at work, paying a levy of 3/- per week from their wages to support the strikers.[58] With an effective union organisation now in existence to channel these funds into the hands of those 'at play' the Association was able to pay the strikers 7/6 per week from its own resources and this was

raised to 10/- per week on the arrival of remittances from the National Association. East of Dudley the greater resources of the Darlaston and West Bromwich Associations and more substantial support from the Amalgamated Association enabled strike pay to be set at 10/- per week for men from the outset, plus a further 1/- per week for each child under twelve, and 6/- per week for boys.[59]

With low coal stocks encouraging hopes of an early and successful conclusion to the strike the miners' confidence remained high through April, but when a second meeting with the owners, on 7 May, produced no concessions there were 'signs of giving way amongst some of the men.'[60] By this time the strike was proving a big drain on union funds. In early June it was reported that the Amalgamated's central strike fund had been reduced to £11,000, though they still had the funds of some 1,500 lodges in reserve. The National Association was in an even worse position and the executive council withdrew financial support from its member associations west of Dudley, and they consequently had to reduce strike pay to only 5/6 per week.[61] With the owners' resistance showing no sign of weakening this further undermined the strikers' resolve. A drift back to work began and by the end of June only about one-third of the miners in the West Bromwich district were still out. Some owners were paying the old rate while others were operating the reduction but with activity in the iron trade

at a low level and warm weather reducing the demand for household coal there was a growing feeling among the men that wages must come down.[62]

Accordingly the strike leaders decided to try to resolve the issue before the strike collapsed altogether and the miners were driven back on the owners' terms. They requested the Mayor of Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain, to approach the masters with proposals for arbitration and a third meeting between the two sides was held in Birmingham on 10 July with Chamberlain presiding. The men's delegation was led by the paid agents and they were assisted in the negotiations by Thomas Halliday, president of the Amalgamated Association.[63] The outcome was the 'Birmingham Agreement' whereby the selling price of coal and miners' wages were linked on a sliding scale. This was such that when the price of furnace coal, as quoted in Lord Dudley's price lists, reached 19/- per ton the wages of thick coal miners would be 5/6 per day, reducing to minimum levels of 11/- per ton and 3/6 per day. With the price of coal currently standing at 16/- per ton the scale gave wages of 4/6 per day and so effected the reduction sought by the coalowners.[64] In this sense the settlement represented a defeat for the miners, but it had greater significance for the future of trade unionism and here the men had achieved an important victory. The Birmingham Agreement was the first negotiated settlement achieved by the Black Country

miners. Their paid union agents took a leading part in its negotiation and it was signed on their behalf by a national union leader in Thomas Halliday. After ten years the Black Country miners' unions had been officially recognised by the coalowners.

The agreement also provided that if the scale did become operative there should be no further adjustment in wages before 29 September, and that it should be terminable by either side at six months notice. The terms were explained by the agents at a series of meetings across the Black Country. West of Dudley acceptance was given only grudgingly and there was talk of continuing the strike, but with funds exhausted this was a hopeless proposition and by the end of July the coalfield was quiet and working normally.[65]

The owners were quick to take advantage of the provisions of the Birmingham Agreement and wage reductions were imposed in October 1874 and July 1875. The second cut was restored after four months but by the end of 1875 thick coal miners' wages stood at only 4/- per day, which was only two-thirds of the level of two years earlier. In spite of this union membership held up well for a time. In July 1875 the Darlaston Association still had over 5,000 members and its funds were reported to be in a satisfactory state,[66] but confidence and hopes of stability were soon undermined by developments outside the Black Country.

Between March and October 1874 membership of the Amalgamated Association fell by almost half, from 106,368 to 57,776, and seven districts seceded, including north Staffordshire and Tamworth. In the early months of 1875 further disputes in south Wales exhausted the funds and at its conference in Swansea in April the association appointed a deputation to attend the Leeds conference of the National Association to urge the fusion of the two organisations. The National accordingly drew up a set of rules for an amalgamation, and in August 1875 in Shrewsbury the final conference of the Amalgamated resolved that

> this conference now dissolves the Amalgamated Association of Miners and gives instructions to the secretary to give notice as required by the Trades Union Act, to the registrar, and accordingly hereby declares the said association to be dissolved from this date, 26 August 1875.[67]

The new organisation formed by the amalgamation took the name of the Miners' National Union. Alexander Macdonald was elected its first president and Thomas Halliday became secretary, but with depression now settling on the coal industry the new unity was ushered in on a very low key. At the end of 1875 the National Union had only about 17,000 members compared with a combined total of over 225,000 for the National Association and the Amalgamated Association just two and a half years earlier.[68]

The decline of unionism nationally was now reflected in the Black Country where it was noted that 'the union

is decreasing in favour and many of the men are seceding from it.'[69] The decline was accompanied by the first signs of a revival of the former friction between the miners' associations of the south-west and north-east sectors. This had been largely obscured over the past three years, first by the spectacular successes achieved during the great boom and then more recently by the necessity of making common cause against the owners during the 1874 strike, but during the long period of stagnation now beginning it was to be renewed in a new and more acute form.

An early indication of this development was given in October 1875 at a meeting of miners in Great Bridge, called to consider the state of trade and possible action on wages. Those urging moderation and caution on the wages question were opposed by a small group led by Benjamin Winwood of the Old Hill Miners' Association, who proposed that the owners be memorialised for increases of 1/- per day and 9d per day in the wages of thick coal miners and thin coal miners respectively. The moderates prevailed on this occasion and the claim was scaled down to 6d and 3d per day,[70] but the militants were not to be denied and this incident marked the beginning of bitter conflict among the miners of the Black Country which was to endure in an acute form for almost two decades and which remained unresolved forty years later.

Notes to Chapter Four on pages 503-506.

C H A P T E R F I V E

MINERS' TRADE UNIONISM: DIVIDED COUNSELS 1876-1889

The Sliding Scale. Through the early months of 1876 the grip of depression tightened on the Black Country coal industry. By the end of April the selling price of furnace coal had fallen to 11/- per ton and under the terms of the Birmingham Agreement miners' wages were reduced to 3/6 per day, the minimum of the scale, on 1 May. Over the rest of the year prices and production stagnated and early in 1877 the owners gave six months notice to alter the basis of the scale. This was accompanied by demands for a return to a nine hour day and the termination of the customary coal and beer allowances.[1]

These developments stimulated the miners' associations to mount a recruiting drive through the summer and towards the end of August this culminated in a series of mass meetings. Typical of the resolutions adopted at these meetings was that by the Willenhall miners who declared their determination 'to use every legitimate means to keep the eight hours system intact, and to keep the old custom of this district regarding allowances of coal and beer.' Significantly the Old Hill Association rejected out of hand any possibility of submitting the questions of time, coal and beer to arbitration.[2] The Black Country men were supported in their resistance,

and especially on the time question, by officers of the Miners' National Union and in face of this the owners relaxed their pressure for an increase in hours and the withdrawal of allowances. In return the miners' leaders agreed in principle that immediate wage reductions of 6d per day (thick coal) and 3d per day (thin coal) should apply under the revised scale currently being negotiated.

With wages already standing at their lowest level since 1863 these negotiations served to call in question the value of trade unionism and in particular of the miners' paid agents. Long standing dissatisfaction with Thomas Griffiths's leadership of the West Bromwich Association had already been exacerbated by his participation in the West Bromwich School Board election earlier in the year and he became the main target for criticism. Typical of many attacks on him was that by 'A Miner and a Union Man' who maintained

> there is room for complaints when I see the reductions after reductions that have taken place in the miners' wages since 1874, and our agent will not submit to one reduction --- It is time for men to grumble when they are working all the week for 19/- and they have got to pay £2/5/- a week to the support of an agent --- if we had no agent in the district our union would thrive once again.[3]

The owners were quick to take advantage of the weakness and division within the miners' associations. The men's proposal for a scale rising or falling by 4d per day for every rise or fall of 1/- per ton in the price of furnace coal was firmly rejected and a scale rising

or falling by 3d to 1/- become operative. With coal prices at their lowest level since 1869 the next sustained movement seemed likely to be upwards and the narrower movement of wages per unit price of coal was clearly a victory for the owners. The men were also forced to concede abolition of the minimum wage and a reduction from six months to three months in the period of notice of termination. The revised agreement, effective from 1 November 1877, provoked an angry reaction from the Dudley, Brierley Hill and Old Hill Associations. Their agitation for a scale of 4d per day to 1/- per ton continued for a time in spite of condemnation by William Crawford and Thomas Halliday of the National Union, but when it found no support among the miners of the north-east sector it petered out.[4]

Among the miners' associations in the Black Country only West Bromwich and Darlaston had affiliated to the National Union, and their relationship with it had always been uneasy. Suspicions of Macdonald persisted, especially in the West Bromwich district, and these were compounded by two features of the organisation and policy of the National Union.

The first of these was the National Union's voluntary levy system. Having been accustomed to the mandatory levies of the Amalgamated Association the south Staffordshire associations were apprehensive that in the event of a strike or lock out in their area the miners

of other districts might not volunteer support. Mistrust between south Staffordshire and other mining districts was rooted in the Black Country's notoriety during the 1850s and 1860s as a source of blackleg labour and it was periodically exacerbated by other frictions, such as that which arose over a lock out affecting a few lodges in the Darlaston district in the summer of 1877. Officers of the National Union accused officials of the Darlaston Association of using pit closures resulting from flooding to draw on national funds.[5] The allegation was subsequently withdrawn but it was symptomatic of the suspicions with which Black Country miners were still regarded by those of other districts, and which were freely reciprocated.

The second feature was the growing movement within the National Union towards restriction of output policies as the means of raising miners' wages. This made little sense in the north-east sector of the Black Country coalfield, where due to emigration and pit closures the labour market was not over supplied in the event of trade recovery producing a normal pressure of work in the mines.

These strains brought the uncertain relationship between the Black Country districts and the National Union to an end in February 1878, when both the West Bromwich and Darlaston Associations seceded.[6] The loss of connection with the National Union was in itself of little consequence. This body never developed into an effective

national organisation and by 1880 its influence was largely confined to Northumberland, Durham and Yorkshire.[7] The withdrawal of the south Staffordshire associations was, however, indicative of the strong resurgence among Black Country miners of their former suspicion and hostility towards national alliances, and over the next decade developments within and outside the local coal-field reinforced and intensified these feelings until the main body of Black Country miners was left completely isolated from the national movement.

Their response to the immediate situation was to draw closer to each other through the formation, in the summer of 1879, of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Miners' Council. This consisted of the agents, secretaries and two working miners from each constituent district, which included Cannock as well as the Black Country districts. Management and working expenses were defrayed by a levy of 1d per head 'occasionally made upon the members.' Headquarters were established in Walsall and Charles Gethin, agent for the Darlaston district, was elected the council's first president.[8]

The new organisation was, however, powerless to bring about any immediate improvement in wages in face of the unprecedented depression now affecting the Black Country coal trade. Consequent on a fall in the price of coal to 8/- per ton, on 5 May 1879 the wages of thick coal miners were reduced to 2/9 per day, exactly one-half of

what they had been five years earlier.[9] The collapse of wages and the parallel increase in short time working had effected a savage reduction in the living standards of miners and they were now emigrating from the Black Country in large numbers, particularly from the north-east sector of the coalfield. Early in 1878 it was reported that while membership of the West Bromwich and Darlaston Miners' Associations had fallen by half compared with five years earlier, due to continuing emigration the proportion of unionists to non-unionists in these districts was much the same as it had been previously, and in the late summer and autumn of 1879 measures were put in hand to establish an emigration scheme for West Bromwich and Tipton miners.[10]

Encouraged by the obvious weakness of the miners' organisations the owners renewed their pressure for an increase in hours, but the miners refused to countenance any such move and the eight hour day achieved in 1872 was preserved. Significantly in the light of the discussion on the leadership hypothesis in Chapter Four, pages 140-2, in a number of districts the working miners overruled the lead given by their paid agents in favour of accepting the owners' proposals for a longer day.[11]

Their success in fighting off this latest attack on the eight hour day encouraged hopes of a wage advance, and in the early weeks of 1880 there developed among the miners a loosely organised agitation for an improvement

in the basis of the Birmingham Agreement.[12] With there being considerable variation between districts on the proposals to be submitted to the owners a conference of the Miners' Council was convened to formulate a common claim, and here the growing differences between the Old Hill Association and the rest of the Black Country districts were clearly revealed. Charles Gethin argued the impossibility of securing any substantial improvement in the existing scale under the prevailing economic conditions and pinned his faith in the goodwill of the owners. 'It was not a question of what they wanted done,' he maintained.

> but what they had the power to do ----- and could they have one more moderate than Mr. E. Fisher Smith, and one who was more willing to take advantage of any move in the market for the benefit of himself and the men.

This view was sharply challenged by William Breakwell, who

> did not see that the existing scale had done everything what (sic) Mr. Gethin had tried to show it had ----- He (Breakwell) did not see anything but to give proper notice and terminate the agreement and if they could not get a better, then do without one.[13]

A motion to give notice to discontinue the Birmingham Agreement revealed the conference exactly divided, 17 delegates voting for the motion and 17 against, and the decision fell to the casting vote of the president, Thomas Griffiths. He voted against giving notice and the motion was lost, but with unrest among the miners continuing the conference was recalled three weeks later. This time 38

delegates voted in favour of ending the Agreement and only ten for its retention, and it was resolved that formal notice of termination be given to the owners on 1 June.[14] Before this could be done, however, on the initiative of the Darlaston Association, 'desirous not to increase trade complications by terminating existing agreements,' the decision was again reversed and no notice was given. This move was roundly condemned by the Old Hill men, who expressed their determination 'to use every possible means to have notice given to break the Birmingham agreement.'[15]

The confusion over the sliding scale issue among the Black Country miners was a reflection of what was now happening at national level. In spite of the opinion periodically expressed by Alexander Macdonald and Thomas Halliday, that

> the sliding scale was a fallacious mode of getting more money for the men ----- (and only) a thorough organisation of the men throughout the country and the equal regulation of labour so as to bring the quantities produced below the demand would give them better prices,[16]

a national conference in Birmingham representing 256,000 miners voted unanimously, in October 1881, that the principle of sliding scales was sound. The same conference, however, also made the first tentative moves towards establishing a national federation with power to formulate a common policy on wages, thus anticipating the formation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and the eventual end of sliding scales.[17]

In the Black Country the sliding scale question was carried over into the counsels of the first Midland Miners' Federation. This was formed by the decision of a delegate conference representing districts in north Staffordshire, Shropshire, Cannock, south Staffordshire and east Worcestershire, meeting in Wolverhampton on 7 March 1881. Executive authority was vested in a board of management consisting of the chairman, secretary and treasurer and five delegates elected on a district basis, the districts being Darlaston, north Staffordshire, Cannock, Shropshire and Old Hill and Gornal (jointly). The expenses of the board were met from a fund established by contributions of ½d per month for every member represented on it. When on Federation business delegates received 6/- per day subsistence allowance and railway fares. The first chairman was Henry Rust, of the West Bromwich Association and the secretary was Henry Barnes from the same association. The treasurer was William Bowen of Fenton in north Staffordshire.[18]

Of the two Black Country men, little is known of Barnes except that he was a local man by upbringing and probably by birth, and that he had been secretary of the West Bromwich Association, apparently in an honorary capacity, from the time of its foundation until he succeeded Thomas Griffiths as agent in 1880. Rust had been born near Stroud, Gloucestershire, in 1831, the son of an agricultural labourer. After working for some years

on canal boats operating between the west of England and south Staffordshire he had settled in the Black Country while still a youth, and entered the mines. He had taken a leading part in the strikes of 1864 and 1874 and as a result had been driven from the pits. He now kept a small shop in Oldbury and combined this with work as an agent for the Wesleyan and General Assurance Society, but he retained his former close connection with the West Bromwich Miners' Association by virtue of being a trustee and frequently acted as delegate and spokesman for the association. The failure of the 1864 and 1874 strikes had convinced Rust of the futility of trying to resist wage reductions in falling markets and he was now a confirmed believer in sliding scales, hoping thereby to secure the same strict correspondence between prices and wages in rising as in falling markets.

Barnes shared Rust's commitment to sliding scales. The Darlaston delegate to the Midland Federation board of management was also strongly in favour and at this stage only the Old Hill and Gornal representative was firmly opposed. In consequence the board's first negotiations with the owners sought an improvement in the scale and with trade improving, in January 1882 a revision of the wages basis was secured. This involved the owners accepting the proposal they had rejected in 1877, that thick coal wages rise or fall by 4d per day for every rise or fall of 1/- per ton in the price of coal, with

corresponding changes in thin coal wages.[19]

This apparent success, however, merely served to reopen the rift within the Federation. Meeting at Netherton the Old Hill miners resolved that the new agreement should not be signed by the agents, and that no scale be accepted which did not give a minimum wage of 3/- per day, at a selling price for coal of 8/- per ton.[20] The resolution was condemned by Henry Barnes, but all appeals for unity by leaders of the Federation met with little response in the Old Hill district. On 6 March a delegate meeting representing 7,400 miners, presided over by William Breakwell, expressed its disapproval of the sliding scale and appealed for the co-operation of other districts in securing its abolition. It was further resolved at this meeting that the colliers of all Black Country districts be urged to give notice for wage advances of 6d and 3d and also, anticipating the Miners' Federation of Great Britain's policy of 'stop days,' that they be recommended to commence work on Tuesday instead of Monday, 'in the belief that over production is the cause of low wages.'[21]

Further indications of the widening division between Old Hill and the other Black Country districts soon followed. Early in April a reduction in the price of coal was announced, involving cuts of 4d per day (thick coal) and 2d per day (thin coal) in colliers' wages. Over most of the coalfield this was received quietly and the miners

continued at work, but the Old Hill Association immediately brought its men out on strike. Threats by the Old Hill men to spread the strike resulted in a conference being hastily called between representatives of the owners and a delegation from the Midland Federation, from which the Old Hill representative was conspicuously absent, and as a result the notice of reduction was withdrawn.[22]

In the summer of 1882, as the long depression lifted momentarily, a fairly general movement for an advance of wages developed among the miners and in the autumn this crystallised in most districts into a demand for an increase of 4d per day, a rise of 10% on the existing rate of 3/4 per day set in January. In the Old Hill district the call was for a 15% increase and between 3,000 and 4,000 miners struck in support of this claim. The Midland Federation board of management, with the Old Hill delegate again a notable absentee, agreed to limit the claim to 10%, and with a rise in coal prices of 1/- per ton being declared in October this was granted by the owners without difficulty. The Old Hill Association at once formally withdrew from the Federation and their reluctant acceptance of the increase was accompanied by resolutions to seek another advance at the end of the month, and never to rest until the sliding scale was broken.[23]

The Old Hill Miners' Association had now clearly succeeded to the tradition of militancy formerly characteristic of the miners' associations generally in

the south-west sector of the Black Country coalfield, and this gives added weight to the hypothesis outlined in Chapter Four, pages 145-7, that the difference in industrial attitudes exhibited by Black Country mining districts was an outgrowth of different economic and social conditions rather than imposed by differences in leadership.

The end of the former distinction in terms of union militancy between south-west and north-east sectors had been marked by the dissolution of the Dudley Miners' Association in 1880, and the retirement of Levi Brittain from active trade unionism. Membership of the once powerful Dudley Association had fallen to only 316 at this time. Its strength had been eroded by a shift in the centre of gravity of the Black Country coalfield south and east into the rectangle having Netherton, Lye, Halesowen and Blackheath at its four corners.[24] In this area production continued to expand into the first decade of the twentieth century while the major part of the south-west sector became an area of 'broken' pits and declining production.

The rapid decline of mining in the Dudley and Brierley Hill districts was accompanied by a marked change in temper among the miners, from the belligerent to the conciliatory and indistinguishable from that associated with the miners' organisations east of Dudley. As a result the West Bromwich Association was able to extend its influence and organisation across the central ridge into the area

formerly organised by the Dudley Association, with Netherton as its southern limit, and from the early 1880s it was often referred to as the West Bromwich and Dudley Association. The Brierley Hill Association maintained its separate existence until the end of the 1880s but in a purely satellite role to the West Bromwich Association. The area south of Netherton remained the province of the Old Hill Association with expanding production providing a basis for militant attitudes.

The hypothesis is further strengthened by an examination of the structure of industry in the Old Hill district. The iron trade had never been so important in the area between Netherton and Halesowen as it had in most other parts of the Black Country, and by 1886 it had declined to the point where the area organised by the Old Hill Miners' Association contained only seven of the Black Country's 85 blast furnaces and a tiny fraction of its 1,316 puddling furnaces and 188 rolling mills.[25] At the same time this area was rapidly becoming the last outpost of the domestic trades of the Black Country. As these trades were subjected to increasingly fierce competition from the machine attempts at defence through co-operation or boards of conciliation were rendered largely ineffective, leaving the operatives to rely almost exclusively on periodic restriction of output strikes to maintain their shrinking markets. By contrast, in the finished iron trade the problems of adjustment to decline were for the

most part resolved through the conciliation machinery of the South Staffordshire Mill and Forge Wages Board.

The Old Hill district's small share in the iron trade meant that its miners would have relatively little contact with ironworkers and the ethos of conciliation. On the other hand they would be fully conversant with the technique and rationale of restrictive strikes practised by the nailers and other groups of domestic workers. The affinity between the Old Hill miners and the craft workers is indicated by the fact that the Old Hill Miners' Association joined the Midland Counties Trades Federation shortly after its formation and took a leading part in its activities, until the establishment of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain provided a more suitable form of alliance. With the continuing expansion of their sector of the coalfield underpinning the militancy of the Old Hill miners, their familiarity with what was now increasingly coming to be seen among miners generally as its main instrument —— the restriction of output strike —— could have been the essential factor transforming attitudes into overt action.

The Old Hill miners' call for an end to sliding scales was now being echoed at national level. In December 1882 a national conference of miners at Leeds reversed the decision of 14 months earlier, that the principle of sliding scales was sound, and resolved that steps be taken to terminate all existing scales by the end of 1883.

This conference also took a further step in the direction of restriction of output policies with the resolution that the time had come when 'working miners ought to regulate the production of coal, in order that their interests may be properly protected and wages raised to a higher standard than they are at present.'[26]

These aims were endorsed by the Walsall conference of the Midland Federation in January 1883, which advised 'the workmen employed in the Midland Counties to assist in carrying out any well devised scheme of restriction.'[27] This marked shift of opinion away from sliding scales within the Midland Federation served to emphasise the growing isolation of the West Bromwich and Darlaston districts, which remained strongly committed to sliding scales, and the widening gap between the main body of Black Country miners and the national movement was further revealed in the next few months.

At the end of April the Earl of Dudley's circular declared a reduction in quoted prices of 1/- per ton, effective from 1 May. This, it was claimed, would make the price of coal 'more realistic' since it had for some time been selling at considerable discounts on official list prices.[28] Under the terms of the sliding scale agreement such a reduction involved cuts in wages of 4d and 2d per day, and the miners' associations at once declared their determination to resist such cuts. The owners responded by giving notice to terminate the agree-

ment, with the clear intention of taking advantage of the depressed condition of the trade to secure a new scale with a lower wages basis.

A delegation from the Midland Federation pointed out to the owners that out of 15,000 miners in the Black Country about 8,000 had not been notified of any wage reduction, and that their employers maintained there was no need for an adjustment in the price of coal. The delegates also stressed that under the terms of the Birmingham Agreement the men had the right to be consulted in advance of price and wage changes. It was accordingly agreed between the two sides that the dispute be submitted to arbitration, pending which wages would be maintained at the existing rate of 3/8 per day, and that a committee of 12 owners and 12 miners should meet to arrange a basis for the formation of a conciliation board for the local trade.[29]

Two Camps. The appointed arbitrator, Haden Corser of Wolverhampton, confirmed that the list prices of coal had not been realised in recent months but he nevertheless recommended that existing wage rates be maintained until the owners' notice to terminate the agreement expired in August. When this time arrived, discussions between the two sides having proceeded satisfactorily, the first South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Coal Trade Wages Board was formed 'to settle the wages question and other matters connected with the trade.' This board was

consciously modelled on the South Staffordshire Mill and Forge Wages Board, being composed of 12 employers' representatives chosen by the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Coalmasters' Association and 12 miners' representatives chosen by constituent associations of the Midland Federation. The chairman was chosen from the employers' side and the vice chairman from among the miners. There was a paid secretary for each side, salary £50, and powers of arbitration in disputes which could not be settled between the two sides were granted to an independent president. The first president was Haden Corser and the chairman was J.B. Cochrane. Henry Rust and Henry Barnes filled the offices of vice-chairman and men's secretary respectively. Expenses were shared equally between the two sides, and there was a rule that there be no suspension of work pending a decision of the board.[30]

The formation of the wages board was favourably received over most of the Black Country coalfield, but in the Old Hill district there was open hostility to it. Here William Breakwell had been succeeded as agent by Benjamin Winwood at some time earlier in the year. The precise date and circumstances of Winwood's appointment are not known but it is probable that Breakwell retired on grounds of age or ill-health and Winwood was duly elected to the agency. At the time of his appointment Winwood was 39 years old, having been born near Bewdley

in Worcestershire in 1844. He had been brought to live in Blackheath by his parents as a six month old baby and had grown up in the Blackheath area. He had started work in a rivet makers shop at the age of six but at ten had joined his father in the mines. As a young man he had become well known as an agitator and the resulting victimisation had forced him to leave the Black Country for a time and seek work in north Staffordshire. He had been amongst those forming the Old Hill Miners' Association in 1870 and since that time, despite continuing persecution, had taken a leading part in its activities.

The mantle of militancy carried by Breakwell over the past 13 years rested easily on Winwood but as with Breakwell his attitudes appear to have reflected those of the miners he led rather than conversely. This was at once revealed in the reaction of the Old Hill miners to the new wages board. At a meeting in Netherton at the end of August, despite Winwood's declaration that he was 'not against the Board, provided it would give them a wage whereby they could live respectably,' the Old Hill men resolved by a considerable majority 'that we have no Board.' A counter proposal 'that we have a Board with a basis of 3/8 per day as minimum wages' was overwhelmingly defeated,[31] and the long standing differences between Old Hill and the main body of Black Country miners became an open conflict.

In addition to precipitating this conflict among

Black Country miners participation in the wages board also involved ignoring the decision of both the Walsall conference of the Midland Federation and the Leeds national conference, to move towards ending sliding scales, and further emphasised the developing isolation of the majority of Black Country colliers from the national movement. Awareness of their potentially dangerous situation and anxiety not to undermine their position further at a time when wage advances of up to 15% were being successfully negotiated in other coalfields led the men's leaders on the board to insist on a minimum wage of 3/8 per day in the scale it was proposed should be operated by the board. They also sought to protect themselves against underselling by the owners by insisting that wages be related to the quoted list prices of coal, rather than to realised selling prices.[32]

The owners' refusal to accept these conditions involved a decision being thrown into the hands of the president, but feeling 'that it would be useless to make an award when one of the parties to the arbitration has declined, except under certain circumstances to accept it,' Corser declined to arbitrate.[33] The men then sought to resolve the position by forcing the owners' hands and strike notices for an advance of 4d per day were issued. Only in the Old Hill district, however, did the miners actually come out, and then only for a few days. With no agreement yet reached on a new scale wages

were still governed by the Birmingham Agreement. At prevailing coal prices this entitled the miners to a wage of only 3/4 per day, and not the 3/8 per day they were in fact receiving. The owners insisted that any stoppage would be followed by a return to work at 3/4 per day, and with coal prices showing no sign of hardening the strike notices were withdrawn and as 1883 drew to a close the coalfield was working normally.[34]

With both the question of the wages basis and the representative nature of the wages board remaining unresolved, through the early months of 1884 efforts were made to persuade the Old Hill men to accept the board's jurisdiction prior to further discussions being held on the wages question. Finally on 28 April a meeting representing some 3,000 miners in the Old Hill district, following strenuous advocacy by Samuel Henry Whitehouse and G.H. Rowlinson of the West Bromwich Association, resolved 'that we submit to the Board, provided we get a basis of 3/8.'[35] It was further resolved at this meeting that the district send a delegate to the wages board, and at its meeting of 20 May the Old Hill miners were represented by Benjamin Winwood. Here it was agreed that the new president, Joseph Rowlands, should take both list prices and realised selling prices from 12 collieries, six selected by each side, and use these to formulate a new wages basis.[36]

Rowlands' award, announced on 4 June, involved a reduction of 4d per day in the wages of thick coal miners,

with corresponding reductions for thin coal miners, effective from 14 June.[37] The miners' indignation at this 'unjust award' was compounded by Rowlands' refusal to explain and justify it and by the break with the established practice whereby they received 14 days notice of any reduction, and in deference to the custom of the trade the coalowners postponed implementation of the award to 28 June. This, however, merely substituted one irregularity for another. The notices of intent to apply the award from 28 June were published only on and after Monday 16 June, which not only again violated the custom of 14 days notice but introduced a new break with tradition in that they were not issued on a pay day.[38] In spite of sustained protests from the miners the owners, fortified by the declared intention of Lord Dudley's agent 'at any cost to stand out for what (he considered) the just claims of the masters to a reduction,' confirmed their intention of implementing Rowlands' award from 28 June and accordingly on Monday 30 June the men responded with strike action.[39]

This strike followed the pattern set by those of 1864 and 1874. Of about 16,000 miners in the Black Country some 4,000 remained at work, at the existing rate of 3/8 per day. In the main these were the men employed by the smaller owners and in the older pits which would never reopen once closed. Their continuation at work was condoned and in fact encouraged by the strikers for

the contribution they could make to strike funds. Public sympathy was largely with the strikers, whose disciplined conduct was in marked contrast to the violence of 1864, and during the first seven weeks over £3,000 was received from various sources for the relief of those strikers outside the unions. Union men received 10/- per week from their various associations.[40] These factors helped stiffen the miners' resolve and faced with the prospect of a prolonged struggle an increasing number of the smaller owners allowed their miners to resume work at the old rate, so that by the end of August about 10,000 were at work leaving 6,000 to stand out against the bigger owners led by Lord Dudley.[41]

With neither side showing any sign of weakening, early in September a move to break the deadlock was made by labour members of Birmingham City Council, led by Councillor Allan Granger, a prominent member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. A meeting of the parties to the dispute with Granger and the Mayor of Birmingham, William Cook, a former branch secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, and a number of prominent local manufacturers was held at the Birmingham Council House on 4 September and after a discussion lasting 2½ hours the following resolution was unanimously agreed:

> That the difference at issue be referred to a Court of Appeal, to consist of the five following gentlemen:- Mayor of Birmingham, Messrs. Alexander M. Chance, Frank James,

Councillor Allan Granger and Arthur Keen, and that pending the judgement of this Court of Appeal the men resume work as soon as possible, to be paid wages at the rate to be pronounced by the Court of Appeal, such rate of wages to remain in force until the 29th day of September 1884, subject to determination on or after that date by fourteen days previous notice to be given by the masters or men.[42]

On Tuesday 9 September, following separate meetings of miners and owners on the previous day, the court was convened in the Birmingham Council House. Here it quickly became obvious that there was no common ground between the two sides and that any attempt at conciliation would be quite futile. The owners insisted that 'the only question before the Court be strictly limited to whether the masters are right in upholding the award, or whether the miners are right in declining to accept it.' The position of the miners was that they could only accept a decision by the court on three conditions, namely:

(a) That no men who are at play be victimised, but all will be allowed to return to work where they worked previous to the commencement of the strike.

(b) That the men at work at the old rate be not taken into account.

(c) That the decision of the Court be made known early enough to allow of either side to give notice on Saturday next, and that notices be given or received by the representatives of the men.

Faced with these quite incompatible attitudes the court of appeal declined to proceed further in the dispute and was accordingly dissolved, leaving owners and miners to continue their struggle.[43]

The men's resolve was maintained for a time but at

the end of September it finally cracked. It had been widely assumed among the miners that the wage levels set on 28 June would operate only for the three months laid down in the revised Birmingham Agreement of November 1877, and that the expiry of this period would automatically open the way for a resumption of negotiations with the owners. In fact the arbitrator's award provided for continuation of the rate of 3/4 per day until such time as a new rate was agreed. With the demand for coal remaining slack and the nearby Cannock collieries working normally, realisation of this and the obvious determination of the owners not to give way gave rise to the prospect of the strike dragging on endlessly, and from early October the strikers began to drift back to work 'at the drop.'[44] By the end of the month the strike was over, having lasted 16 weeks, and from 1 November normal working was resumed at the reduced rate of 3/4 per day for thick coal miners and 2/8 per day for the thin coal men.

The strike had two immediate consequences. First, it destroyed the wages board and left such a legacy of bitterness that for the next four years the employers refused to meet in conference with the miners. During this time coal prices fluctuated between 9/6 and 10/6 per ton but miners' wages remained unchanged at 3/4 and 2/8 per day. Second, the strike left all the Black Country miners' associations desperately weak in both members and

finances. It did nothing, however, to change the disposition of forces within the coalfield, nor did it result in any modification of attitudes. The immediate response of the West Bromwich Association was a tentative move towards exploring the possibilities of a closer association with the owners, on the lines of the 'alliance philosophy' which was at that moment emerging from discussions between operatives and employers in the nut and bolt trade. In the Old Hill district there were renewed calls for a move towards restriction of output. Neither movement produced any positive results. The first foundered on the owners' refusal to meet with the miners, the second simply petered out in face of the continuing depression in the trade and the low morale of the miners.[45]

Attempts to stimulate morale and revive organisation culminated in a delegate conference of the Midland Federation in Wolverhampton on 29-30 November 1886, where it was agreed that a thoroughgoing reorganisation of the Federation be put in hand. Enoch Edwards of north Staffordshire was elected president, Samuel Henry Whitehouse was elected secretary and Benjamin Dean of Walsall became treasurer.[46] Dean was soon to become an important figure in mining trade unionism in the Black Country. He was born in July 1839 at Rushall, near Walsall, the son of a miner. As a young man he had been converted to Primitive Methodism and it may have been this which first stimulated his interest in trade unionism.

In spite of having almost no formal education as a child he had become a fluent and witty speaker and a good organiser, and by the time of his election as treasurer of the Midland Federation he had become well known locally as an advocate of shorter hours for miners as a means of restricting the output of coal.

Enoch Edwards shared these views and the election of these two clearly indicated that opinion within the Federation had moved decisively into line with the growing national movement against sliding scales and in favour of restriction of output. Whitehouse's position on the question of sliding scales versus restriction of output remained ambivalent at this time, but following his departure from West Bromwich to become agent to the Somersetshire miners in 1888 it was resolved in favour of restriction of output and he was elected to the first committee of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in 1889.[47]

This further shift of opinion within the Midland Federation marked another stage in the isolation of the main group of Black Country miners from the national movement, and this was soon rendered effectively complete by three developments in mining trade unionism, national and local.

The first of these was the formation, in 1887, of the Pelsall Miners' Association with Benjamin Dean as agent. This was the culmination of developments in local

unionism consequent on changes in the structure of mining in the north-east sector of the Black Country over the past decade. During this time flooding and exhaustion had caused an increasing number of pit closures in the area between Darlaston and Wolverhampton, which was organised by the Darlaston Miners' Association. This association had also during this same period extended its influence into the Pelsall district, which lies some two miles north of Walsall and beyond the Bentley fault which marks the northern edge of the Black Country coalfield. By reason of its later development and freedom from the problems of flooding, coal production in the Pelsall district was still expanding in the late 1880s and in fact continued to expand to 1914 and later.[48]

Thus while the more central districts of the Darlaston Association progressively declined the Pelsall mining community continued to increase in size, so shifting the centre of gravity of the association from Darlaston to Pelsall. This development was accompanied by the rise of the Cannock coalfield and as a result of their parallel growth the miners' leaders in the Cannock district, such as Albert Stanley, came to exert a steadily increasing influence in Pelsall as the Darlaston Association decayed. This influence was strongly anti-sliding scale and the emergence of a strong local personality of similar views in the person of Benjamin Dean resulted in the formation of a separate Miners' Association in Pelsall in 1887,

strongly aligned with Cannock and other districts affiliated to the Midland Federation in its opposition to sliding scales and in favour of restriction of output. Significantly in the light of the hypothesis in Chapter Four, pages 145-7, the rise of a militant miners' association was again associated with expanding coal production and the decay of such small share in the iron trade as the Pelsall district had.[49]

The second development in local unionism also stemmed from the decline of the Darlaston Association. The secession of the Pelsall district to form its own association meant that there was little reason for maintaining a separate organisation for the mining districts between Wednesbury and the Bentley fault, where decline was now well advanced, and what remained of the Darlaston Association was absorbed by the West Bromwich Miners' Association, in whose district the Sandwell Park and Hamstead Collieries still gave a considerable basis of organisation. Together with the earlier spread of its influence across the central ridge following the collapse of the Dudley Miners' Association this meant that by the end of the 1880s the West Bromwich Association controlled mining trade unionism across the whole of the Black Country, with the exception of the two militant enclaves around Old Hill in the south and Pelsall in the north.

The formation of the Pelsall Association and the continuing opposition of the Old Hill Association to

sliding scales and all forms of conciliation meant that the West Bromwich Association was now being 'squeezed' between two hostile groupings of miners. The response of Henry Rust and Henry Barnes was to seek a new accommodation with the coalowners, and in October 1888 agreement was reached on the formation of a new wages board for the coal trade of south Staffordshire and east Worcestershire. It was decided that this consist of 12 representatives from each side and that it administer a sliding scale having a minimum wage of 3/4 per day for thick coal miners and rising or falling by 1d per day for every rise or fall of 2d per ton on the price of coal. The price of coal used for the determination of wages was to be an average of the realised selling prices of 12 firms, six chosen by each side.

It was further agreed that the customary perquisites of miners should be continued, and that the board continue for six months certain, and afterwards be subject to termination at three months notice by either side. There was no provision for regular price ascertainments but either side could call for one at one months notice, subject to there being a minimum period of three months between ascertainments. Power to deal with minor disputes was delegated to a sub-committee of four members, two from each side, together with the two paid secretaries, these being John Dudley for the owners and Henry Barnes.50

This development did not have any effect on the Pelsall miners. For purposes of wage determination Pelsall was considered part of the Cannock mining district. For Benjamin Winwood and the Old Hill Association the formation of the second wages board repeated their dilemma of five years earlier. Principle ruled against membership of the board but the logic of their industrial situation strongly indicated active participation; nearly all the pits in the Old Hill district were owned by masters who had pits elsewhere in the Black Country and they could hardly pay different wages in different pits. In addition their dilemma was now heightened by the fact that Winwood had recently attended a national conference in Manchester, where the representatives of 200,000 miners had agreed to press for a 10% wage advance and notice to this effect had already been given by the Old Hill Association.[51]

After conceding that 'the Wages Board would be beneficial to owners and operatives' Winwood nevertheless decided to follow through with the 10% claim as formulation of this had preceded establishment of the wages board.[52] This decision had the effect of transposing the dilemma, in that the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Wages Board, representing about 12,000 miners, could hardly ignore a claim backed by 200,000 miners once this claim was brought to its doorstep. Accordingly the board agreed that 'if a further advance

above the 5% already given (in the basis of the new sliding scale - E.T.) becomes general in the coal mining districts it shall also be given in this district without further notice.'[53] This agreement resolved the position of the Old Hill men and Winwood duly took his place as their representative on the wages board where, somewhat surprisingly, he was elected vice-chairman. As well as bringing the Old Hill men within the board, this concession was a first acknowledgement of the growing impossibility of the Black Country miners standing apart from a national movement which was becoming increasingly cohesive and influential. Paradoxically, the transformation of this movement into an institution, with the formation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, was the third development of the late 1880s which transformed the developing hostility between rival groups of Black Country miners into a formal breach.

The national wages movement which was put in hand at the Manchester conference in September 1888 gathered momentum through the winter of 1888-89 and at the end of February Lancashire took the initiative in suggesting a conference to discuss a further advance of 10%, and to 'agree upon some uniform system of restriction.'[54] The conference met at Colmore Chambers, Newhall Street, Birmingham from 26-29 March 1889 with 56 delegates representing 317,500 miners. Barnes and Winwood, as secretary and vice-chairman respectively of the South

Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Wages Board attended, and both backed the pay claim but Winwood's enthusiastic endorsement of a resolution seeking to restrict output by limiting the miners' working week to five days of eight hours contrasted sharply with Barnes's reluctance to commit himself and the men governed by the sliding scale of the wages board to any scheme of restriction.[55]

These conflicting attitudes reflected the growing confusion among Black Country miners over the relative merits of sliding scales or limitation of hours and output as a means of improving wages, and in the weeks following the Birmingham conference this multiplied. In some districts the former reluctance to abandon the wages board was now beginning to break down in favour of association with the national movement, but pro-board sentiment still remained strong across most of the Black Country coalfield. Thus the Bloxwich miners resolved to join the Pelsall Association and so dissociate themselves from the board, but in the central districts the influence of Barnes and Henry Rust rallied the waverers to ensure continuation of the board. Immediately it became clear that the board was to continue Winwood came under strong pressure from the Old Hill miners to resign his position as vice-chairman and at the end of April he did so. The formal withdrawal of the Old Hill Association from the wages board followed within a few days, and the antagonism of the past six years between Old Hill and the

rest of the Black Country miners now became an open breach.[56]

This development further weakened the already uncertain authority wielded by the wages board. As the Labour Tribune noted: 'Large numbers of men are chafing . . . because of the necessity laid on them by the Board of holding aloof from a wages movement in which other countries are taking part.'[57] In an attempt to allay the discontent the basis of the wages board's scale was adjusted at the end of May 1889, so that the minimum thick coal wage of 3/4 per day applied when the price of coal stood at 4/9 per ton instead of 5/- per ton, with corresponding adjustments at every point until the maximum of 4/6 per day was reached at a coal price of 7/1 per ton. In effect this gave to Black Country miners the 5% wage advance now being implemented in most other coalfields, following agreement between unions and owners in these areas that the 10% increase mandated by the Birmingham Conference in March would be granted in two stages.[58]

The success of the national wages movement in securing two successive 10% wage advances strongly indicated that it had acquired sufficient 'stability and coherence' to enable it 'to issue in a permanent association' and in the early autumn a national conference, again meeting in Birmingham, appointed a small committee to draft constitutional resolutions and submit them to a conference in Newport at the end of November.[59] The delegation

from the Midland Federation to this conference included Benjamin Dean, representing the Pelsall Association, and Benjamin Winwood, representing Old Hill. The West Bromwich Association was not represented, and neither were the men covered by the South Staffordshire Wages Board.

With most of the ground already having been prepared, proceedings at Newport involved mainly 'a registration of existing practice' to set the formal seal on details of the constitution of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. The most important feature of this constitution was in the Rules. The section 'When Support Shall be Given' included provision for mutual support by the various constituent counties, federations and districts, and then under the heading 'Defensive Action' came the last rule, Rule 20, reading:

> That whenever any County, Federation or District is attacked on the Wages question or any action taken by a General Conference, all members connected with the Society shall tender a notice to terminate their contracts - if approved of by a Conference called to consider the advisability of such joint action being taken.[60]

Adherence to these rules was clearly incompatible with acceptance of sliding scales and in the Black Country the future of the wages board was again called in question. Through the early months of 1890 the men's leaders on the board engaged Dean and Winwood in acrimonious debate on the relative merits of allying with the national movement or leaving wage regulation to the

board and itsscale.[61] The issue allowed no compromise and with emotions running high and questions of prestige involved neither side was prepared to abandon its position. Accordingly, in September 1890 the West Bromwich Association formally withdrew from membership of the Midland Federation and hence from the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.[62] The open breach of the past eighteen months had now widened to the point where the Black Country miners were clearly divided into two hostile camps.

Notes to Chapter Five on Pages 507-510.

CHAPTER SIX

MINERS' TRADE UNIONISM: UNRESOLVED PROBLEMS 1890-1914

The Wages Board and Organisation. The secession of the West Bromwich Association from the Miners' Federation of Great Britain left the wages of some 9,000 Black Country miners to be regulated directly by the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Wages Board. In addition the wages of a further 2,500 miners working in the district organised by the Old Hill Association were also controlled in practice by the board, despite their refusal to accept its authority. The number of miners affected by the policy of the West Bromwich Association was in sharp contrast to the number who were actually members. In July 1893 this was only 2,218, grouped in 57 lodges.[1] Most of the men within the wages board area did, however, pay its small levies and in the minds of many Black Country miners, as with the ironworkers, the board appears to have been a substitute for organisation rather than a complement to it. As such it was condemned by the Labour Tribune as 'a delusion and a snare,'[2] but for the first years of its existence this was obscured by rising coal prices and the corresponding improvement in wages.

Between 24 March 1889 and 15 April 1890 the average price of coal realised by the 12 firms selected by the board rose from 5/9 per ton to 7/6 per ton, raising miners' wages from 3/10 per day to 4/8 per day. The wage of 4/8

per day represented an increase of 40% above the level of 1888, exactly in line with the advance of wages in the Miners' Federation areas. The Federation's successful resolution of the wages question brought expressions of 'unbounded confidence' in its leaders at a delegate conference in April 1890 and saw the new national organisation safely launched.[3] To the majority of Black Country miners, however, the parallel success of their own wages arrangements merely demonstrated the irrelevance of the Federation's principles and policies to their situation, and with the initial disturbing impact of the formation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain having been safely survived there appears to have been a considerable accession of support to the wages board through 1891.[4] In January 1892 the chairman of the board, Colonel J.B. Cochrane was able to tell the Royal Commission on Labour that the relationship between employers and men associated in the board was 'in every respect satisfactory.' He did, nevertheless, feel impelled to qualify this remark by pointing out that 'one section of miners ----- has worked rather independently of the board and perhaps interfered with its complete success,'[5] and the friction between the miners in the wages board area and those in the adjoining Miners' Federation of Great Britain districts, which had been concealed over the past two years as the prosperity of the coal trade had sustained identical wage advances, was clearly revealed again as coal prices turned down.

By the time of the third Annual Conference of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in mid-January 1892 miners in a number of districts outside the Federation had been forced to accept wage reductions, and the conference unanimously adopted the following resolution:

> That wages in the coal trade are not too high at the present time, and as we have no voice in fixing the selling prices we shall do all we can to resist any reduction in wages, no matter what price the employers think proper to dispose of their coal, and that if an attack be made in any county or district of this Federation, Rule 20 be put into force at once.

A fortnight later, having heard reports that in Cumberland, the Forest of Dean and parts of Lancashire miners were being asked to accept wage reductions consequent on surplus coal from other districts being sent into their markets and 'selling at unfair and unprofitable prices,' the executive committee of the Federation decided 'to call a conference of all Great Britain to take into consideration the question of ceasing work at all collieries for two or more weeks at one and the same time.'[6]

Meeting in Manchester on 11 February 1892 the special conference determined to counter the threat to miners' wages by 'playing the pits' in the Federation districts for one week, from 14-18 March.[7] This decision placed the Old Hill miners in a difficult position. Loyalty to the Federation required compliance with its decision, but at the same time they were inextricably bound up with the rest of the Black Country coalfield and the wages board

had made no move to reduce wages. A delegate meeting of the Old Hill Association on 22 February, after a protracted discussion, decided by 13 votes to 7 not to apply the 'stop week.'[8] This decision was justified on the grounds that neither their own conference nor the Manchester conference of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was fully representative, and it seemed unlikely that the wages board men would stop work. When the latter duly resolved 'not to entertain the proposal of the Manchester conference'[9] the stop week saw the Black Country coal-field working normally, with Barnes and Rust actively employed in keeping at work any who might have felt inclined to demonstrate solidarity with their fellow miners in the Federation districts.[10]

The action of the Federation nevertheless stimulated considerable discussion among Black Country miners and in the weeks following the stop week miners in a number of districts expressed themselves in favour of schemes of restriction of various kinds.[11] When, however, the question of a weekly 'stop day' was raised in the wages board in May the owners expressed their strong objection and the board duly resolved that 'it being certain that the principle of a proposed "stop day" is economically wrong, the members of this association cannot be parties to its adoption.'[12] This abruptly cut short the public debate, and with coal prices and wages in the Black Country still holding up, over the second half of 1892 the coalfield remained quiet.

In the Federation areas wage levels were also held but these came under increasingly heavy pressure as coal prices continued to weaken. The growing threat to wages was a matter of constant concern to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain executive committee, and in February 1893 they resolved that a further attempt be made to dispel the 'dark cloud' by miners in all districts taking a general holiday.[13] A special conference, meeting in Birmingham at the end of February, revealed no unity on the question. Yorkshire was in favour of a two week general holiday, while Lancashire and Cheshire preferred one week only. Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, South Derbyshire, North Wales and Cumberland were against a general stoppage, but in favour of a weekly stop day. Durham and the Midland Federation were opposed to any form of stoppage. The only 'outside district' represented, the Scots, were prepared to support a general stoppage of work but were so poorly organised that their support was, in any case, of doubtful value.[14] The outcome was that both the general holiday (by 133 votes to 117) and the stop day (by 182 to 47) were rejected by the conference, and the executive committee accordingly decided to postpone any decision on a general stoppage of work or other system of restriction to a future meeting.[15] They were, however, precluded from the necessity of taking any decision by a sequence of events through the spring and summer of 1893 which culminated in a 15 week lock out of miners.

Piecemeal attacks on the Federation wage rate began in the spring and by March almost 3,500 men in the Midland Federation alone were locked out resisting reductions. About 250 of these were in Cannock Chase, 200 in Pelsall and 30 in Old Hill.[16] At the end of June the coalowners demanded a 25% reduction in wages to compensate for a fall of 35% in the selling price of coal. On 19-20 July a special conference of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain resolved almost unanimously 'to submit to no reduction in wages,' and the stage was set for the national lock-out. On the question of tactics there was a sharp division within the Federation and only by a vote of 149 to 101 was it decided 'that the men in the federated districts who have received no notice of reduction in wages tender their notices on the next making up day to terminate contracts.'[17]

In the Federation districts on the northern and southern edges of the Black Country this decision posed difficult problems. For the Old Hill men it repeated their dilemma of 16 months earlier over the decision to play the pits, but in a more acute form. Coincidentally with the Federation's decision that those who had received no notice of the wage reduction should also terminate contracts, the South Staffordshire Wages Board announced that in spite of an ascertainment revealing that since April 1890 the price of coal had fallen from 7/6 per ton to 6/- per ton wages would be maintained at the existing level

of 4/8 per day (thick coal) and 3/8 per day (thin coal). For the Pelsall miners the position was different, but no less difficult. Because they were considered to be part of the Cannock district for purposes of wage settlement they had found no difficulty in observing the stop week of March 1892, and had 'played' together with the Cannock men. Their position now was much less clear cut. Of about 5,000 miners in the Pelsall district only some 1,500 had received notice of the reduction.[18]

As the lock out began at the end of July Benjamin Dean in particular was in a very difficult situation. As a member of the executive committee he had a clear loyalty to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and this required that he instruct all the Pelsall men to give notice to terminate contracts. At the same time he was acutely aware of the difficulties this would bring. The economic fortunes of the Pelsall miners were closely bound up with those of the wages board men who clearly would stay at work and benefit substantially as orders were diverted to the Black Country from the locked out areas. In compliance with the Federation's decision, on 29 July the Pelsall men duly gave 14 days notice of strike action but as the date for the actual withdrawal of labour approached Dean confessed that

> when the strike began he considered himself fortunate because so few in his district had received notice, but he had recently found it very much otherwise — he had to be going from place to place impressing upon the men who had not received notice the necessity of

> loyalty to the Federation, and that of voluntarily ceasing work. The conference resolution on the point was passed without much difficulty, but he was bound to say that carrying it out was quite another thing.[19]

On the expiry of the strike notices on 12 August the Pelsall miners loyally came out, but almost at once a conference of owners and men was called. Here it was agreed that the men resume work

> at the recent rate of wages on condition that after three weeks they shall be allowed to work from day to day without any notice being required from either side to cease work until the present dispute is settled or until the Miners' Federation of Great Britain confirm this arrangement.

Dean also undertook to press the Federation to accept the employers' offer, made at the instigation of the Midland owners, to withdraw the notices of reduction on the understanding that no increase in wages be asked for until prices should come back to the 1891 level of 8/- per ton at the pithead. He justified his 'apparent change of front' by explaining that

> Mr. Pickard had been informed that many employers were willing to withdraw their notices if the men would return to work at the old rate of wages ----- By next Tuesday (22 August) it was expected that not only in Staffordshire, but in other counties men would begin to work at the old rate of wages.[20]

Dean's prediction proved ill-founded. The London special conference of the Federation on 22 and 23 August made a slightly more generous concession than the owners were demanding on the wages question, namely not to claim any wage increase until coal prices reached the 1890 level of 8/3 per ton at the pithead, but the linking of this

proposal to one calling on the owners to co-operate with the Federation in checking 'the baneful system of under-selling which now prevails among coalowners' rendered it unacceptable. These proposals to the owners were accompanied by a decision 'that no pit in this Federation be allowed to recommence work until a general settlement is made for all to commence at one and the same time.'[21] Accordingly the Pelsall men again stopped work and a mass meeting unanimously resolved to stand firm behind this decision. By this time the Association's funds were almost exhausted, £5,763/12/-d having been spent in relieving strikers in other districts, while miners in the South Staffordshire Wages Board area and in Old Hill were working six full days a week as the Black Country coalowners were inundated with orders.[22]

In Old Hill the decision of 16 months earlier, not to take part in the stop week, clearly indicated to Benjamin Winwood that among the colliers in his district the realities of their industrial situation still over-rode loyalty to the Federation and no attempt had been made to get the men out. By early September recognition of these realities was growing among the miners of the Pelsall Association and it was being predicted that 'independent action will be taken in this district whatever the decision elsewhere.'[23]

When the adjourned special conference meeting in Nottingham on 14-15 September again declined to allow men

to return in those pits where no reduction was asked for Benjamin Dean faced 'one of the darkest moments in his life' as he was torn between loyalty to the Federation and the mounting pressure in his own district for a return to work. He decided to advise a resumption of work and on 17 September his advice was endorsed overwhelmingly at a mass meeting of the Pelsall Association, by 4,000 votes to 39, subject to satisfactory terms being arranged with the owners. These were agreed as follows: that the men return to work on the usual terms of 14 days notice for either side; that the old rate of wages be paid; and that the general settlement of the Federation, when achieved, become operative on the next pay day after such settlement, but not to affect the current week or fortnight.[24] The agreement was signed by Dean on behalf of the men and work was resumed on 27 September.

Conscience stricken, Dean tendered his resignation from the executive committee of the Federation, but with his decision to advise a return to work proving merely to anticipate by a few days a marked shift of opinion within the Miners' Federation of Great Britain this never became effective. Two days after the Pelsall men's return to work, on 29 September, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain special conference unanimously agreed that wherever no reduction was asked for 'the men be allowed to return to work' provided they could do so immediately and not simply drift back. All men returning were to pay a

levy of 1/- per day during continuation of the lock out, the proceeds from which together with grants and subscriptions from outside bodies, were to be 'equally distributed amongst the members of the Federation who are resisting the 25% reduction.'

By the end of October almost 60,000 men, of whom about 63% were Federation members, were at work at the old rate but with neither side apparently prepared to make any further concession the deadlock was only broken after another two weeks by the dramatic and unprecedented intervention of the Prime Minister, inviting the Miners' Federation to join the owners in a conference to be chaired by Lord Rosebery. The invitation was accepted and terms for a resumption of work were agreed on 17 November. These involved the men returning at the old rate pending the formation of a board of conciliation, this to have power 'to determine from time to time the rate of wages on and from 1 February 1894.'[25]

The success of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in fighting off the proposed reduction represented a victory for a new principle of wage adjustment among miners, the principle of the living wage, and the beginning of an end to the 'idolatry of Supply and Demand' which had been central to the thinking of miners on the wages question for almost two decades.[26] This had been nowhere more evident than in the Black Country, and in spite of widespread expectations that 'the whole of

the Wages Board district will shortly be merged in the Federation,'[27] in an area where aloofness from the national movement had been elevated into a matter of principle, and where that principle had become inextricably entangled with personalities, old habits died hard.

The first response of the men's leaders on the South Staffordshire Wages Board to the settlement of the 1893 dispute was to give the requisite three months notice for an alteration in the sliding scale, such that wages of thick coal miners would rise or fall by 1½d per day instead of 1d per day for every rise or fall of 2d per ton in the price of coal. At a meeting of the board in April the employers' side agreed to adopt the amended scale subject to condition that it operate automatically on three months ascertainments, in a similar manner to the scale currently being applied by the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board. In the ensuing debate the men's side of the board echoed Benjamin Pickard's presidential address to the fifth Annual Conference of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in their call for 'the principle of the living wage,' and for the employers the chairman of the Board, Colonel Cochrane, agreed that while 'they had no connection with (the Federation) ----- when other districts acted it must affect South Staffordshire.'[28] The principle of an automatic scale was emphatically rejected by a series of mass meetings of miners, but the owners nevertheless agreed to adopt the scale proposed by the men and it became operative from 30 April 1894.[29]

This agreement within the South Staffordshire Board coincided with the finalisation of the constitution for the board of conciliation and on 19 July 1894, when coal prices were mostly below the level of the previous summer, an agreement was concluded within this board that a 10% wage reduction would be applied in the Federation districts from 1 August. It was further agreed at this time that the new rate should remain unaltered until the end of 1895, and thereafter for a period of seven months might be varied upwards but not downwards. The new level of 30% above the 1888 wage rate was accepted by the owners as a minimum for a period of two years from 1 August 1894, and the Federation agreed to accept a maximum of 45% above this rate over the same period.[30]

Through 1894 prices in the Black Country showed the same downward tendency as in other coalfields and at the end of August an ascertainment called for by the owners revealed a price of only 5/10 per ton compared with 7/- per ton eight months earlier. On the scale recently adopted this required a reduction in colliers' wages to 4/2 per day for thick coal men, but on protests that the sharp fall in prices was the result of underselling the owners agreed to hold wages at 4/4 per day, a cut of 10% in the existing level of 4/8 per day and exactly in line with the adjustment in the Federation districts.

The miners' response to this decision was, on the face of things, surprising. Many of them, including those

at Sandwell Park and Hamstead in West Bromwich where wages board influence was probably strongest, immediately came out on strike.[31] The ostensible cause was that insufficient notice had been given of the reduction but underlying this was a considerable undercurrent of feeling among the miners that the board made no real difference to their position and that wages were now effectively governed by the actions of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. Even Henry Barnes, who had recently retired from active work with the West Bromwich Association, when asked to define his attitude to the Federation replied: 'Weren't we the founders of it? We started the Midland Federation, but we want Home Rule as well as Federation.'[32]

With the sliding scale now effectively a dead letter the question of 'Home Rule' became increasingly academic, and over the next few years such resistance to Miners' Federation of Great Britain influence as remained among Black Country miners was progressively eroded. A major influence in swinging the opinion of the wages board men towards the Federation was the election of Thomas Mansell as secretary to the West Bromwich Miners' Association. He was a local man, born in 1866, and had entered the mines at the age of 12, when a promising scholastic career at Baylies's Charity School, Dudley, was cut short by family circumstances. As a working miner he had become an acknowledged expert on pit safety and his interest in

improving the working conditions of his fellow miners had led naturally to an active involvement in trade unionism and the affairs of the West Bromwich Association. In 1890 Henry Barnes had stepped down as agent to the West Bromwich Miners' Association. Advancing years had made the active work of agent increasingly difficult and he had been succeeded by Henry Rust. Barnes had then reverted to his former position of secretary but in 1894 he resigned this office and Mansell was elected to succeed him. Still only 28 years old at the time of his election the feuds and animosities of the past meant little to Mansell, and he could readily grasp the realities of the situation in which the South Staffordshire Wages Board had been placed by the parallel rise of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. The influence of the Federation was now so powerful that either side of the wages board could invoke its example. The employers naturally refused to entertain any question of paying higher rates than those in the Federation districts, and any attempt to set lower rates would certainly involve the miners withdrawing from the board.

In face of Mansell's 'peaceful persuasion' and incessant exhortations from Benjamin Dean and Benjamin Winwood support for the sliding scale crumbled until in July 1898 the wages board met at the request of the men's side, 'to consider altering the present constitution of the Board by giving up the sliding scale and making it

a conciliation board pure and simple as in the Federated districts.' The miners' representatives pointed out that 'continual pressure' to this end was now being exerted by the men, but the owners would not agree to abandon the scale unless the men gave the requisite three months notice.[33]

By this time the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and the owners had agreed on a 2½% wage increase in the Federation districts, subject to re-establishment of the conciliation board which had been terminated in 1896 on the breakdown of negotiations on the owners' request for a 10% wage reduction. This condition was accepted by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and the new board formed with an agreement on the same lines as those of July 1894, that the board would operate for a period of two years from 1 January 1899 with wages subject to a maximum of 45% and a minimum of 30% above the 1888 level. The 2½% increase then became effective from 1 October 1898, by which time agreement had also been reached within the South Staffordshire Wages Board on an identical advance operative from the same date until the end of January 1899, when consideration would be given to the question of a further advance.[34]

The wages board's deliberations on this question of a further increase resulted, on 13 February 1899, in the unanimous adoption by the board of a resolution to advance the wages of thick coal miners by 2d per day from the

first making up day in April, and that this be followed by a further advance of 1d per day in October.[35] The increases represented 5% and 2½% respectively on the 1888 rate of 3/4 per day and were again identical in magnitude and timing with those agreed in the conciliation board on 27 January. These developments clearly indicated that the end of the wages board and its sliding scale was now imminent, and in August the decisive step was taken. Meeting in Great Bridge a delegate conference of miners overwhelmingly approved the action of their representatives on the wages board 'in giving notice to terminate the sliding scale agreement, seeing that it has been imperative for nine years,' and on the expiry of the notice in October the principle of wage regulation on a sliding scale was formally abandoned. At the same time the wages board was reconstituted as a wages and conciliation board, 'thus keeping open the means of communication between employers and workmen.'[36]

In parallel with these developments discussions had been proceeding between the West Bromwich Miners' Association and the Midland Federation, with Albert Stanley taking the leading role on behalf of the Federation and Tom Mansell heading the West Bromwich delegations, on the matter of the Black Country miners re-joining the Federation. These were brought to a successful conclusion during the summer of 1899 and formally sealed in December when Mansell joined Stanley, Benjamin Dean and Benjamin Winwood on the executive committee of the

Midland Federation.[37]

Despite its success in at last bringing the main body of Black Country miners within its organisation the Miners' Federation of Great Britain still faced an uphill struggle to establish itself in the central part of the coalfield. Three factors in particular served to blunt the organising drive which especially from 1906 was pursued vigorously and with marked success in other coalfields. The first of these was the long isolation of these miners from successive national movements. As a result they had developed 'an insularity and an inward looking preoccupation which neither offered nor sought solidarity with their fellows in other coalfields.'[38] The process of overcoming this deep rooted insularity was a protracted one and remained far from complete at the outbreak of war.

The second factor was the continuing deterioration of mining conditions. This had two important consequences for union organisation. By 1913 only three major collieries, Sandwell Park (employing 248 men), Hamstead (697 men) and Baggeridge Wood (opened in 1910 and employing 903 men in 1913) remained in operation on the south Staffordshire coalfield south of the Bentley fault and annual production from this area had fallen to only 3,000,000 tons.[39] Coalgetting in the 'slack pits' which employed about four-fifths of the labour force was extremely difficult and dangerous, and working conditions

generally were poor. In this situation apathy abounded. Under the Mines Regulation Act of 1860 as amended in 1887, for example, miners employed in any pit had power to elect a checkweighman, initially from among their own number and then whoever they chose. In many coalfields the checkweighmen so elected were the first permanent officials around whom lodges grew to provide a basis for union organisation. In the central districts of the Black Country coalfield there were no checkweighmen as late as 1908.[40]

The second consequence of deteriorating mining conditions was the perpetuation of the butty system in the Black Country coalfield. As early as 1867 the decision in the case of Regina vs. Cope had established that liability for injury sustained in butty operated pits lay with the owner and not with the sub-contractor[41] and five years later the Mines Regulation Act of 1872, as well as strengthening the code of safety regulations applicable to all mines, imposed a statutory obligation on every colliery owner to employ a trained and certificated manager. In the Black Country these regulations were implemented only very slowly. The owners of pits whose profitability was constantly being squeezed as mining conditions deteriorated were reluctant to apply regulations which would have raised costs appreciably, and the shortage of inspectors and the large number of small enterprises in the coalfield meant that evasion of statutory

obligations carried little risk of detection and penalty. In addition the difficulties of working the ten yard seam encouraged reliance on 'practical men,' so that in 1908 about one-quarter of the labour force in the mines of the Black Country was still employed on the butty system or its variant the 'little butty' system.[42]

This latter was a form of gang labour or collective piece-work at the coalface. A 'side of work' or chamber between pillars in the ten yard seam would be divided into three or four stalls. Each stall would be let by the owner to a 'leading man' who would then engage another two men of similar standing and ability to himself to hew the coal, and a further half dozen miners to act as loaders and do other ancillary work. In hewing the coal the leading man acted as 'top cutter' with the other two stallmen acting as 'bottom cutter' and 'holer.' They were paid nominally on a piece-work basis, but in practice they usually received day wages, with the top cutter receiving $1\frac{1}{2}$ days pay for an eight hour working day, the bottom cutter receiving $1\frac{3}{8}$ days pay and the holer $1\frac{1}{4}$ days pay. Loaders and ancillary workers received one days pay for each days work.[43] The hierarchy of status and earnings within this system and its transfer of a capitalist function to working miners, by making the leading men 'little contractors,' all served to undermine the solidarity of Black Country colliers and render the organising efforts of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain less effective than elsewhere.

The third factor serving to frustrate organisation by the Federation was the fact that Black Country miners did not form a unified community isolated from their fellow working men as did miners in many coalfields. There were no pit villages and the colliers were 'interwoven with other industries.'[44] This further undermined solidarity and the growth of community consciousness, and in an area where the commitment to trade unionism generally remained weak the consequences of this for organisation among the miners were compounded. As a result in 1912 less than one quarter of the 8,000 miners within the area of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Miners' Association, as the former West Bromwich Association was now called, were union members.[45]

In Old Hill and Pelsall organisation was much stronger than in the central districts of the coalfield, with the continuing expansion of production and a longer tradition of association with the national movement providing a basis for the growth of union membership. By the time of Benjamin Dean's death in 1910 the Pelsall Association had developed into one of the strongest of the smaller miners' associations, with 4,451 members in 27 branches and 'almost as much money per head of membership as any other trade association in the country.' In 1913 the Old Hill Association claimed 100% membership of the 2,500 miners in the townships of Old Hill, Blackheath, Rowley, Halesowen and Lye.[46]

Between these associations and the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Association former suspicions and rivalries persisted long after the latter's affiliation to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. The Pelsall Association made repeated attempts to 'capture' members from the collieries along the northern edge of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Association's area, and for purposes of Miners' Federation of Great Britain organisation Old Hill joined with the Highley Association some 20 miles away in Shropshire rather than link up with the Association adjacent to it, where there were collieries belonging to the same owners and where mining conditions were similar. In addition to organisational rivalries differences of attitude and temper also remained among Black Country miners and these were clearly revealed on the question of Employers' Liability and Workmen's Compensation.

Employers' Liability and Workmen's Compensation. By reason of the high accident rate in their industry the law relating to Employers' Liability and Workmen's Compensation was of particular importance to miners. As early as 1863 the Miners' National Association had argued that elementary safeguards against accidents in mines would only be introduced when accidents were made more costly to the employer.[47] The case for enforcing the liability of employers as a means to securing greater safety in mines and other places of work was taken up by

the TUC and other unions but all efforts to amend the law in this respect were strongly resisted. Eight Employers' Liability Bills were introduced into the House of Commons between 1872 and 1879 until 'through the pertinacity of Henry Broadhurst a partial reform was obtained from Gladstone's Government in 1880, in spite of the furious opposition of the great employers of labour sitting on both sides of the House.'[48] Under the terms of the 1880 Act employers became liable for payment of compensation whenever an accident was proven to be due to negligence by a manager or foreman, or to carrying out an improper order or rule. The 'doctrine of common employment,' by which the employer was not liable for payment of compensation to workmen who suffered injury through the negligence of other workmen in the same employment, though abridged by these provisions, was not abolished.

This doctrine had been implicitly accepted by Black Country miners at a series of meetings in the spring of 1876 in connection with a previous Bill. Demands made at these meetings that 'all persons injured in the course of their employment should be compensated by their employers' had been qualified by acceptance of the clause 'unless there was negligence on the part of the men.' With the system of traditional payments for accidents in the pits functioning satisfactorily, the Act of 1880 made little difference to the position of Black Country miners regarding Employers' Liability, and Lord Dudley's

declared intention of 'contracting out' of the Act by establishing an insurance fund on the basis of 1:1 contributions by himself and the men was widely welcomed as regularising existing practice and placing it on a firmer institutional basis.[49]

Contracting out was given legal sanction in 1882 by the judgement in the case of Griffiths Vs The Earl of Dudley, to the effect that a workman continuing in employment after receiving notice that he must forego all his rights under the Act and accept in lieu thereof a claim on a fund to which the employer contributed was held to have relinquished his rights under the Act.[50] This decision cleared the way for the establishment later in the year of the South Staffordshire and Worcestershire Permanent Provident Society, to operate instead of the provisions of the Act within the Black Country coalfield. The contribution for thick coal miners was set at 2d per week, that for thin coal miners at 3d per week. The owners' contribution was on slightly less favourable terms than initially envisaged, this being 1d to every 3d subscribed by thin coal miners, and 2d for every 2d subscribed by the thick coal men. Disablement benefit was at the rate of 8/- per week, payable for the whole period of disablement. In case of fatal accidents the funeral allowance was £5, with an additional £15 for an unmarried member. A widow of a married member received 5/- per week whilst remaining the deceased's 'chaste

widow' and conducting herself 'with becoming propriety, to the satisfaction of the Society,' with an additional 2/6 per week for each child under 13 years of age. The agreement establishing the society was signed on behalf of the miners by Henry Rust and William Breakwell, and it was duly registered under the Friendly Societies Act 1875.[51]

The society appears to have functioned to the general satisfaction of Black Country miners through the 1880s, but from 1890 it was the subject of increasing attack by the Old Hill and Pelsall miners in line with the Miners' Federation of Great Britain's opposition to employers contracting out of what it considered a statutory obligation. In 1897 the passing of Joseph Chamberlain's Workmen's Compensation Act, embodying the principle of compensation to workmen for all injuries sustained in the ordinary course of their employment and not caused by their own acts or default, gave the Federation a large part of what it sought, but it did little to change the position in the Black Country. Under the terms of this Act schemes containing an obligation upon workmen to join as a condition of employment were specifically prohibited and this effectively abrogated the South Staffordshire and Worcestershire Permanent Provident Society, but provision for contracting out remained. Section Three of Chamberlain's Act provided that the Registrar of Friendly Societies

> after taking steps to ascertain the views of employers and workmen may certify a scheme of compensation, benefit or insurance, and if such scheme be not less favourable to the general body of workmen and their dependents than the provisions of the Compensation Act the employer may contract with the workmen that the provision of the scheme shall be substituted for the provisions of the Act, and in that case the employer is liable only in accordance with the scheme.[52]

Even in the moment of affiliating to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, which had set itself solidly against any form of contracting out, miners' leaders in the West Bromwich Association district were persuaded by the Black Country coalowners, and without undue difficulty, to enter into a scheme to succeed the provident society, as allowed by Section Three. This was the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Mining District Compensation Fund, established in the summer of 1899. Contributions for workmen were set at 2d per week, with boys under 16 paying 1d per week. Employers paid 3d per week for each man employed and 1½d for each boy. If contributions proved insufficient to cover disbursements an obligation was placed on employers to make up the deficiency, up to a maximum payment of 4d and 2d per week. In case of fatal accidents to members a sum of £15 was payable to cover funeral and other expenses and widows received 6/- per week plus 1/6 for each child under 13 'during chaste widowhood.' For single men there was provision for a partial allowance for dependants, up to a maximum of 6/- per week, at the discretion of the central committee. In case of total disablement there was provision for a

payment of 10/- per week (6/- for boys under 16) for 52 weeks, with this being commuted into a lump sum if disablement continued for a longer period. Disablement allowance was payable from the date of the accident and the fund was under an obligation to provide a doctor for the injured man.

The scale of allowances payable by the fund was below that provided for under the Act but in its dating of disablement compensation from the time of the accident and the provision of a doctor the terms of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Fund were more favourable than those of the Act, which required no payment of compensation for the first fortnight of disablement and placed no obligation on an employer to provide a doctor. The signatories to the local scheme on behalf of the miners were Henry Rust, Tom Mansell and Harry Whitehouse, all of the West Bromwich Association.[53]

The Pelsall mining district was not covered by the fund. As for purposes of wage settlement it was considered part of the Cannock district, where the employers had accepted the provisions of Chamberlain's Act. Of those miners who were eligible to enter the fund about nine-tenths did so. Predictably, the majority of those remaining outside were in the Old Hill district where many miners, in accordance with the policy of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, refused to join. Their refusal placed these men in an anamolous position, similar

to that which had formerly obtained in their relationship with the now discontinued wages board. They formally dissociated themselves from the local scheme but by reason of being inextricably bound up with the rest of the coal-field their situation, as previously in relation to wage determination, was effectively governed by decisions made on behalf of the main body of Black Country miners whose basic attitudes remained quite different from those of the Old Hill men.

The anomaly was resolved in November 1901 by the decision in the case of Prescott vs The Rowley Station Colliery Company Limited. Charles Prescott, a pikeman, was ordered to drive tubs to a certain place in the pit. This required the adjustment of points on a tramway. While Prescott was making the necessary adjustment the horse drawing the tubs started and the tubs ran over his head, so damaging it as to prevent him ever again working as a pikeman. When he attempted to recover compensation from the company it was contended that Prescott had contracted out of the 1897 Act and fell within the provisions of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Compensation Fund. He was duly granted the maximum amount payable by the fund, 10/- per week, but sought a larger sum through the court.

In evidence it was stated that weekly deductions from Prescott's pay totalled 8d, being 6d for sick pay and 2d for liability insurance, both having been in

operation before 1897. It was also stated that on the Act being passed a number of men employed by the company had been called together on the pit bank and asked if they would agree to contract out in favour of a local scheme. Their willingness to do so had been declared carried on a show of hands. No rules of the local scheme had been posted at the pit where Prescott was employed until after his accident, and an examination of those in court revealed that they imposed upon members a number of restrictions not countenanced by the Act; limitation of compensation for total disablement to 10/- per week; the 'chaste widowhood' condition for dependants of married men fatally injured; a rule, 'savouring of martial law,' requiring a person in receipt of benefit not to be abroad before 6 a.m. or after 6 p.m. in winter (9 p.m. in summer), and not to go more than three miles from home without sanction of the central committee; and a number of others. Judgement was given that by reason of there being no clear contract with the employer and the rules of the fund not being posted, Prescott was considered not to have contracted out of the Act and he was awarded compensation of 15/- per week.[54]

The coalowners in the Old Hill district immediately posted notices at their pits to the effect that

> all workmen employed in or about this colliery will, unless they forthwith give notice of their intention not to remain under this (local) scheme or, as the case may be, to become members of such fund, be considered and treated as members of the above fund, and

that they accept the same in substitution of the Workmen's Compensation Act 1897.

This action at once destroyed the position taken by the Old Hill men with regard to the Act. As Benjamin Winwood saw, unless all the men employed by a company were unanimously resolved to place themselves outside the local scheme and work only in accordance with the provisions of the Act 'no useful purpose could be served at all, as any few men who gave notice would subject themselves to the liability of being discharged unless the whole of the men at work were thoroughly united.'[55] With union membership still considerably less than 100% at this time the Old Hill miners were far from 'thoroughly united' and they were brought reluctantly within the provisions of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Mining District Compensation Fund until its operation was terminated under the provisions of Section 15(4) of the Workmen's Compensation Act 1906.

Eight Hours. A second major preoccupation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain during its first 20 years was the question of the eight-hour day, and on this matter the rival Black Country associations were able to exhibit a much greater degree of unanimity. As with Employers' Liability the concern of miners to restrict hours of labour long pre-dated formation of the Federation. Their basic position on this issue was clearly asserted at the inaugural conference of the Miners' National Association in November 1863.

> Overtoil produces over-supply; low prices and low wages follow; bad habits and bad health follow, of course; and then diminished production and profits are inevitable. Reduction of toil, and consequent improved bodily health, increases production in the sense of profit; and limits it so as to avoid overstocking; better wages induce better habits and economy of working follows ----- The evil of overtoil and over supply upon wages, and upon the labourer, is therefore a fair subject of complaint; and we submit, as far as these are human by conventional arrangements, are a fair and proper subject of regulation.[56]

The necessity for restriction of output as an essential means of maintaining or improving wages expressed in this statement remained central to the thinking of miners over the next 25 years. Failure to secure a shorter working day led miners to fall back on a more direct form of restriction, that of 'playing the pits' while surplus stocks were cleared, and the 1880s and early 1890s saw a number of attempts made to restrict output in this way. These were not notably successful and restriction of output as a possible means of raising wages occupied the attention of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain for only a short time, their last discussion of it being on the eve of the 1893 lock-out. Attention increasingly turned to the legislative enactment of an eight-hour day as an alternative means of protecting wages by reducing output. At the 1888 TUC conference Samuel Woods, who in 1889 became the first vice president of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, led those supporting the call to limit hours of labour in the mines to eight per day and from 1890 the Federation's campaign

to secure an eight-hour day by legislation gathered momentum.[57] Over the next 18 years a succession of Eight Hours (Miners') Bills were introduced into the House of Commons until in December 1908 a Government Bill was finally enacted.

Prior to the formation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain the need to restrict output did not become a major issue among Black Country miners. The achievement of an eight hour working day at the height of the great boom in 1872 and the accelerating decline of the major part of the coalfield thereafter rendered the question of restriction largely academic. Though the Old Hill Association from time to time made gestures in support of restriction policies, through the 1880s the gathering groundswell of opinion among miners generally on the need to reduce the over supply of coal broke upon the rock of Black Country insularity and isolation.

The establishment of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain made for little immediate change in this situation. During the stop week of March 1893 the Old Hill miners remained at work and the lock out of the Federation in the following year was described by one colliery owner as 'a godsend to masters and men alike,' as it stimulated production in the Black Country to the highest level for many years.[58] However, the Federation's move away from policies of direct restriction towards a legally enacted eight-hour day after 1893 enabled the Old Hill

Association, with an eight hour day already established, to endorse this policy and through the 1890s local MPs were under constant pressure from Benjamin Winwood to support the succession of Eight Hours (Miners') Bills.[59] When the West Bromwich Association affiliated to the Miners Federation of Great Britain in 1899 it was also able to commit itself unreservedly to this aspect of Federation policy, for the same reason as the Old Hill Association, and the friction between the two districts on the issue of Employers' Liability was conspicuously absent on the eight hours question.

Solidarity was reinforced as miners in both districts came under increasing pressure to make concessions on the hours question during the first years of the twentieth century, and when the Government Bill came before Parliament in the early months of 1908 the miners' leaders in the Black Country presented a united front in support of it. Opposition to the Bill was particularly fierce among the Black Country coalowners who claimed dispensation from any legal restriction of hours on grounds that conditions in the thick seam were uniquely dangerous and that the limit of eight hours bank to bank envisaged by the Bill would impair the carrying out of safety work and seriously reduce production. Their opposition was endorsed by the South Staffordshire Mines Drainage Commissioners who claimed that 'the Bill, if passed, would shut up half the mines in the district.'[60]

These claims were ridiculed by Albert Stanley at a meeting in Dudley on 23 November 1908. He maintained that the 'wondrous knowledge and powers' attributed to the stallmen, making their 'immediate presence' essential to the safe working of the pits were 'largely imaginary.' He was strongly supported by Tom Mansell and Benjamin Winwood, the latter insisting that 'the reasons given for the proposed exemption with regard to the Black Country were moonshine,' and 'what they needed in the Black Country was a six hour day.'[61] An amendment at the committee stage of the Government Bill's passage through Parliament, to exclude leading stallmen in the Black Country from the provisions of the Act, was defeated and when the Act took effect on 1 July 1909 there were no exemptions. It was accordingly widely welcomed by miners across the Black Country amd after the adjustment of some initial difficulties operated satisfactorily.

The Individual District Minimum Wage. Following the affiliation of the West Bromwich Association to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in 1899 wage rates across the whole of the Black Country coalfield were those determined nationally by the Federation and the associated coalowners. During the first years of the twentieth century, together with the attacks on the working day, a number of attempts were made to undercut these rates, particularly by the smaller owners, but these were successfully resisted and in March 1909 wages in the Black Country stood at 5/- per

nominal day, exactly the same as in other Federation districts. When the implementation of the Eight Hours Act in July 1909 rendered illegal any attempt to increase hours of work many Black Country owners intensified their efforts to enforce wage reductions,[62] and while the general level of wages was held some miners working in 'abnormal places' found their earnings seriously affected.

Abnormal places were those places in which, on account of exceptional difficulties, the coalgetter on piecework was unable to earn an acceptable wage within the eight hour day now being worked. Hitherto Black Country miners when they found themselves in an abnormal stall had been able to approach the pit manager or butty, either personally or through the union, and secure an adjustment in the stint which was acceptable to both sides. One unexpected effect of the operation of the Eight Hours Act was to make agreement on such adjustments increasingly difficult until in some pits miners worked 'without knowing what they were earning until they got their wages ----- and these were often so small that they were insufficient to feed wives and children.'[63]

Black Country miners were therefore able to react sympathetically to the resolution adopted at the Miners' Federation of Great Britain Annual Conference in October 1910, that 'the miners of Scotland, England and Wales be requested to meet their respective employers and demand a fair living wage to be paid to all miners working in

abnormal places.' Twelve months later this was broadened into a demand for 'an individual District Minimum Wage for all men and boys working in mines in the Federation area without any reference to the working places being abnormal,' and the Black Country associations immediately opened negotiations with employers on this question. These were proceeding satisfactorily when a special conference of the Federation, in November 1911, resolved to include the outside districts in its demand. When a request for a meeting with the coalowners of all districts was rejected on grounds that 'no useful purpose would be served' the Federation resolved that a ballot be taken in all districts for or against a national strike in support of the individual minimum wage demand.[64]

The result of the ballot, revealed at a special conference in Birmingham on 18 January 1912, was a vote of 443,801 for strike action and only 115,921 against and it was accordingly decided 'that notices be tendered in every district so as to terminate at the end of February.'[65] By this time the Black Country owners had conceded a satisfactory basis for the establishment of a minimum wage and many miners in the area felt themselves caught up in a dispute not of their making. This was reflected in the local ballot. Although the returns of both the Old Hill and the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Associations showed a considerable majority in favour of the strike, the large number of abstentions — between

15% and 20% in some districts — indicated that many miners 'knowing the matter has been settled locally, cannot see why they have been asked to vote.'[66] Nevertheless in accordance with the decision of the Federation both associations issued strike notices, expiring on 2 March, and when an intervention by the Government failed to resolve the position miners throughout the Black Country, as in all the other coalfields of Britain, stopped work on that date.

Such a situation was quite unprecedented, both nationally and locally. Never before had such a concerted cessation of work occurred in mining or any other industry and never before had the Black Country miners' associations identified solidly with a national movement. The new found solidarity of Black Country miners with the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and among themselves was, however, soon disrupted by a resurgence of former suspicions and hostilities. The national anxiety provoked by the strike was made more acute in the Black Country by fears that a stoppage of more than a few days might well mean the closure of many pits. The chairman of the Drainage Commissioners, George Macpherson of the Wednesbury Oak Ironworks, appealed to the local miners on behalf of the owners for exemption from the Miners' Federation of Great Britain policy of insisting on a national strike. For the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Association Tom Mansell replied that

loyalty to the Federation was obligatory upon them, but the work of the Commission would be allowed to continue unhindered and men would be permitted to raise slack in order to keep the pumps going. Benjamin Winwood's reply on behalf of the Old Hill Association had a characteristically harsher note. This was to the effect that while pumping would also be allowed to continue in the Old Hill district no union man would bring any coal to the surface. 'The owners could not afford to close the pits,' he insisted. 'It was bluff.'[67]

The contrasting attitude of the two associations was reflected in the different levels at which their minimum wage demands were pitched. The Old Hill Association claim was for a minimum of 7/- per day for firemen in the thick coal, scaling down to 5/3 per day for other grades. The rates claimed by the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Association ranged only from 6/3 per day to 5/- per day. Winwood accused the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire leadership of 'gulling and hood-winking' their men instead of giving the real facts and claimed that in private they admitted that their men were entitled to a minimum of 6/10½d per day. Mansell countered that the Old Hill claim for a 7/- minimum was 'a bogey set up to poison the men of that district and one which was contrary to the resolutions of all national conferences and to the expressed intention of the Federation.' In an attempt to resolve their differences the executive of

the Old Hill Association called a joint conference of the two associations in Dudley on 25 March but this was boycotted by the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire men and antagonism was carried over into the local negotiations which followed the settlement of the strike.[68]

The strike was brought to an end by enactment of the Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Bill on 29 March. This made the minimum wage a statutory obligation but left the actual figure to be decided separately in each district by wages boards operated by employers and workmen. These provisions bitterly dissappointed the Federation leadership, who had fought throughout for a national minimum of 5/- per day for all adult workers other than piece workers and 2/- per day for boys at the age of fourteen. They also left the membership of the Federation deeply divided, and this showed in the ballot on whether to resume work pending settlement of the various minimum rates by the district boards. The voting was 244,011 against a return and 201,013 in favour, but two of the largest districts — the Midland Federation and South Wales — voted by almost 2:1 for the resumption of work.[69]

The executive committee thus faced a difficult decision. Continuation of the strike involved the possibility of a serious strain on the unity of the Federation and 'the disintegration of the national struggle into District fights.' At its meeting on

4 April the committee resolved, after a long discussion, that as the ballot calling the strike had stipulated that a two-thirds majority must be obtained the same majority should be required for its continuation, and this not having been given they advised a resumption of work. Their advice was accepted by a special conference two days later, by 449,500 voters to 125,000, and the strike was over.[70]

The return to work had been anticipated in the Black Country. Within about a fortnight of the strike beginning some non-union men had begun to drift back to work in the small pits around Bilston and Willenhall and before the end of March some union members in the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire district, notably in Wednesbury and Darlaston, had also returned. In the Old Hill district support for the strike remained solid throughout, but in the ballot following the passing of the Minimum Wage Act both associations voted overwhelmingly to end the stoppage. In the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire district this was followed by an almost immediate return to work, but in Old Hill the resumption was delayed until after the special conference had endorsed the executive committee's recommendation and not until about mid-April was the whole coalfield working normally.[71]

Implementation of the provisions of the Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act in the Black Country proved difficult. The first difficulty arose over the grouping of districts

for the purposes of minimum wage assessment. Benjamin Winwood's desire to have the Old Hill district grouped with Cannock and Pelsall, where easier coalgetting conditions were reflected in higher average earnings, had been frustrated during the Bill's passage through Parliament when Albert Stanley, since 1907 MP for North West Staffordshire, had secured an amendment establishing Cannock and Pelsall as a separate district. Winwood's claim that Old Hill should be joined with Highley, with which it was associated for purposes of Miners' Federation of Great Britain affiliation, was also rejected. Highley formed part of the Shropshire district and the Old Hill Association area was included within the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire district, whose limits were co-terminous with those of the Black Country coalfield.[72]

With the jurisdiction of the district board established a further difficulty arose over the question of apportionment of representation on it. This was immediately taken in hand by the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Association and the employers who eventually allocated only one of the six places on the men's side to Old Hill. Winwood's claim for three of the six places was rejected, as also was his subsequent call for a separate board for the Old Hill district. The Old Hill Association executive committee then resolved to boycott the board and were not represented at any of its early meetings.[73]

The board also had considerable difficulty in drawing up an acceptable structure of minimum rates for a district which included Baggeridge Wood Colliery, one of the largest and best equipped in the country with electric haulage and hydraulic lifts, as well as a large number of 'broken' and partly flooded small pits. Discussions between the two sides broke down and the independent chairman, Sir Walter Lawrence, had to be called on to break the deadlock.

His award, announced on 22 May 1912, was a complicated one. For pikemen on day work in thick coal pits it established three grades, with minima ranging from 6/6 per day to 5/8 per day. For pikemen paid by the stint in these pits it gave a minimum rate of 50% above the 1888 standard of 3/4 per nominal day, with the pikeman having the right to be measured not less than $1\frac{1}{4}$ days stint. The minimum rates for roadmen and repairers and loaders and fillers in the thick coal were set at 5/4 per day and 5/- per day respectively. Among pikemen in the thin coal pits the award differentiated between those in the Dudley district and those in the Wolverhampton district. Pikemen on day rates in the Dudley district were awarded a minimum of 5/11 per day compared with only 5/8 per day for those in the Wolverhampton district. Piecework rates reflected this difference, the rate being set at 50% above the 1888 levels of 2/8 per nominal day in the Dudley district and 2/5 per nominal day in the

Wolverhampton district. In both districts the pikeman was awarded the right to be measured not less than 1½ days stint. The same differentiation was applied to brushers in the thin coal pits of the two districts, their rates being 5/11 per day and 5/8 per day in Dudley and Wolverhampton respectively, but the rate for loaders was set at 4/9 per day in both districts.

The award also laid down elaborate conditions to safeguard the owners. To qualify for payment of the minimum wage a miner had to attend for 80% of the time which his pit worked each week, except when sick or injured. Failure during four consecutive weeks to hew such quantities as would normally earn the minimum justified the employer in discharging a miner or paying him only for the amount of coal actually cut. Disputes procedure involved a miner first approaching colliery officials. If no agreement could be reached between the two the manager was required to confer with union officers, and failure at this stage meant the dispute being referred to the district board whose decision would be final.[74]

Predictably, the reaction of the two miners' associations to the award differed sharply. For the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Association Tom Mansell, while recognising that its provisions did not grant the miners all they sought, declared it 'highly satisfactory.' The Old Hill men promptly came out on

strike in protest against it. Their complaints were that the award contained insufficient safeguards for miners on piecework, that the creation of different grades of pikeman would result in all hewers being down graded to the lowest paid level, and that no beer allowance was included. Calls for the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire men to join them met with no response, and with the association's funds already depleted. the strike quickly collapsed so that by mid-June all the pits of the Black Country were at work.[75]

The strike of 1912 and its aftermath revealed quite clearly that after 50 years the attitudes of the miners' organisations in the Black Country were still strongly conditioned by the circumstances of their origin and early years. Suspicions about the value of association with any national movement deriving initially from hostility to Alexander Macdonald at the time of the 1864 strike had been consolidated among the main body of Black Country miners by the circumstances of their industry. The rapid decline of the major part of the Black Country coalfield from the early 1870s made its miners particularly susceptible to the ideas of 'political economy' and consequently amenable to acceptance of their institutional expression in the form of sliding scales and conciliation machinery, while in other coalfields the effects of over production on wages encouraged miners to move towards the adoption of restriction of output

policies and the concept of a living wage.

These contrasting attitudes had effectively isolated most Black Country miners from the national movement until the last year of the nineteenth century and while this isolation had now been overcome by the rise of a particularly powerful and cohesive national organisation in the form of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, in the central districts of the coalfield membership of the Federation was still confined to a minority of miners and it exercised only a tenuous authority.

The second enduring characterstic of mining trade unionism in the Black Country was the marked differences of outlook and attitude among its district organisations. These differences, it is suggested, resulted originally from a different industrial ethos within the two main sectors of the coalfield consequent on differences in their industrial structure, and the contrasting fortunes of the mining industry itself in the two sectors from the middle 1860s. Through the 1880s the spread of decline into the south-west sector of the coalfield had brought an end to the former distinction in terms of attitude and temper between its two main sections, but the combination of expanding coal production with a particular industrial structure had ensured the survival of the Old Hill Miners' Association as a militant enclave on the southern edge of the coalfield.

This development, and the rise of a second militant association just beyond the northern edge of the Black Country coalfield, the Pelsall Association, enabled the Miners' Federation of Great Britain to extend its influence into the main part of the coalfield more quickly than might otherwise have happened. At the same time the earlier association of the Pelsall and Old Hill miners with the Miners' Federation of Great Britain served to reinforce the existing tradition of differences in temper and so ensured continuation of rival organisations long after their formal affiliation to the Federation and the retirement or death of the personalities involved.

Two opportunities to merge the Old Hill and the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Associations were presented in quick succession soon after the 1912 strike. In July 1912 Benjamin Winwood retired from the position of agent to the Old Hill Association and he died in September 1913. Tom Mansell died in office as secretary of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Association in March 1915, but on both occasions old memories and antagonisms precluded any moves to merge the two organisations. The Old Hill Association maintained a separate existence, with Samuel Edwards as agent, until it was dissolved in 1939 when membership had fallen to only a few dozen. These were then absorbed into the South Staffordshire and

Worcestershire Association. When the Miners' Federation of Great Britain was reorganised as the National Union of Mineworkers in 1944 this Association became a constituent district of the National Union of Mineworkers. Its active life continued until 1968 when the closure of Baggeridge Wood Colliery brought mining activity in the Black Country coalfield to an end, and its affairs were finally wound up during 1972.

Notes to Chapter Six on pages 511-515

PART THREE

CHAPTER SEVEN

CRAFT UNIONISM: EARLY DIFFICULTIES 1863-1885

Sources of weakness. The great variety of metal using trades and industries which had grown up in the Black Country by the early 1860s was not matched by any corresponding development of trade organisation. A Tin-Plate Workers' Society, dating back to 1802, was in existence in Wolverhampton and in 1864 this body assisted in the formation of the Wolverhampton Plate-Locksmiths' Co-operative, but these were the only workers' organisations to enjoy more than a transient existence.[1] The Tin-Plate Workers' Society amalgamated with a parallel organisation in Birmingham to form the Amalgamated Tin-Plate Workers of Birmingham, Wolverhampton and District in 1876. From this emerged the National Amalgamated Tin-Plate Workers of Great Britain and subsequently the National Union of Sheet Metal Workers and Braziers.[2] The Plate Locksmiths Co-operative proved strong enough to resist the employers' attempts to undersell it during 1865 and 1866 and maintained a precarious existence until 1880, when it collapsed as 'the demand for these costly articles ceased.'[3]

Even the limited success of the locksmiths proved beyond the capability of the workmen in other trades where the growth of lasting organisation was strongly inhibited by a number of factors inherent in their craft structure. The first of these was the small scale of

production. In many trades 'either the domestic craftsman or the small workshop proprietor employing less than 40 persons was the representative figure; and since these trades together provided the bulk of employment in the finished manufacture, it was they who stamped the character of the area as a whole.'[4] Even where there was a high degree of division of labour, as in the saddlery and horse ironmongery trades, this had little effect in modifying the predominantly domestic character of the industry, partly because hand labour had not been displaced by machinery to any considerable extent and partly because little power was required.

The high proportion of domestic production in many trades — in lockmaking and nut and bolt making this amounted to between 25% and 30%; in nail making virtually all production was organised on an outwork basis[5] — had three important consequences for the structure of the labour market in these trades. First and most important in view of the presence in the Black Country of two industries with a strongly cyclical nature, coal mining and iron manufacture, it made entry into these trades easy. Many Black Country miners and ironworkers of this generation had been brought up in homes where their parents had practised one or other of these trades in an outhouse and would themselves have acquired the basic skills of that trade at an early age. At times of unemployment or strikes in their own trade it was easy for these workers to turn to the trade they had

learnt as a child for as long as was necessary. The nail trade was especially subject to 'flooding' by casual labour of this kind, but in so far as they contained elements of domestic production all trades were liable to it in some degree.[6]

Second, it placed the employer in a vastly superior bargaining position vis-a-vis the worker. Every daily or weekly application for work by the craftsman was, in effect, a separate wage bargain with the applicant facing competition from others in a similar position and not knowing what rates his competitors had accepted.[7]

Third, in many occupations it gave rise to the employment of a high proportion of women workers. The number of women workers in the Black Country appears to have been relatively small until the middle years of the nineteenth century, but with the onset of secular decline in many of the area's traditional crafts depressing men's wages thereafter the proportion of women engaged in these trades increased steadily until by the 1880s about 25% of the labour force in chainmaking consisted of women, while in the key making section of the lock trade and in some branches of the nail trade they were in the majority. Even where the rules or custom of the trade required that women be paid at the same rate as men competition from largely unregulated female labour inevitably further undermined the wages paid to men.[8] Together these consequences of the high proportion of domestic production in the metal trades of the Black Country seriously

weakened the workers' bargaining position and by the same token frustrated the growth of labour organisation.

In some of these trades a further element of weakness arose from the presence in the market of middlemen or 'foggers,' standing between worker and master and undercutting the market to the detriment of both. The fogger appears to have emerged in the nail trade as early as the eighteenth century when nailmasters began to feel the disadvantages of employing workers directly. The risks of stock carrying, the need for elaborate book-keeping, supervision of the issue of rod iron and precautions against embezzlement all encouraged the rise of an intermediary, who then issued iron to the nailers and sold the finished products to the nailmasters for less than it would cost for the master himself to have them made. In earlier times this was achieved by exploiting the labour of those who preferred irregular work or by taking advantage of the general body of nailers at times of bad trade. When the trade went into secular decline, from the 1830s, a permanently overstocked labour market increased the opportunities for exploitation and by the middle of the nineteenth century the nail trade supported a whole class of foggers.[9] In other industries where the disparity between supply and demand for labour had not yet reached the position it had in the nail trade the foggers' opportunities were more restricted, but their activities were an important contributory factor undermining the price of labour and its

capacity for organisation in the small chainmaking and gun lock filing trades.

Where the scale of industry was untypically large for the Black Country, as in foundry work or the production of domestic hardware, and the inhibiting consequences of domestic organisation therefore largely absent the prevalence in these industries of the hiring or subcontract system, whereby subcontractors rented workshop space from the owners and independently hired assistants or underhands, provided an equally effective obstacle to the development of organisation.[10] By imposing on the subcontractors an element of risk bearing and some exercise of managerial functions this system gave these 'superior workmen' something of the status of employers. Together with the large number of establishments in many industries and wide variations in working conditions this effectively prevented any appearance of union organisation among them.

The hiring system had similarly debilitating consequences for trade unionism amongst the underhands. The highly competitive nature of the product markets was felt with increasing severity as one moved down the structural hierarchy, so that the brunt of it was borne by the underhands in the form of constant downward pressure on their day wage rates. The underhands had little skill to protect them and with product variation requiring the same individual bargaining between them and subcontractors as between subcontractors and owners,

this unrelenting pressure on wages largely destroyed any basis for combination amongst the lower grades of workman.

In these larger firms, many of them family concerns, a further factor inhibiting union organisation was the paternalism of employers. Kenricks of West Bromwich, for example, had from the early years of the nineteenth century encouraged their workmen to form benefit clubs as an insurance against sickness and to cover funeral expenses.[11] At Tangye's Cornwall works in Smethwick the following schemes were 'in active operation' at company cost from the firm's foundation in 1859: a fund giving £100 at death or making up income in case of illness to 20 foremen and superior workmen; a fund giving the families of workmen killed while at work a sum ranging from £25 to £100, according to earnings, and a portion of their wages in case of accident 'whether they have contributed to the accident by their own carelessness or not;' and a fund to assist the widows and orphans of workmen. There was a dispensary in the works, with two resident surgeons and a dispenser, whose facilities were available at a cost, including drugs, of 4/- per annum for each person or 18/- per annum for a family. In addition the firm employed a full time sick visitor and provided for its employees science classes, a Sunday school and a library.[12] By directing working class self help into forms acceptable to the middle class and by

encouraging continued reliance on traditional solutions to the problems of unemployment, sickness and old age such attitudes on the part of employers were a powerful factor restraining the growth of trade societies with their threat of disruption. Kenricks, for example, were free from any sort of labour dispute until as late as 1888.

The final factor acting against the appearance of organisation was the irregularity of employment in many trades. Wide fluctuations in the volume of employment were due in part to the cyclical nature of the finished iron trade from which the user trades derived, but were exaggerated by the similarity and divisibility of the technology of finished metal goods in the mid-nineteenth century and later.

This resulted in a high degree of resource mobility, which had the effect of quickly transmitting competition and cyclical fluctuations from one section of the metal trades to another as producers increased the production of some lines to offset a fall in demand for others.[13] Combined with a high degree of elasticity in the supply of labour, and with entry into many trades largely uncontrolled this produced wide swings in the volume of employment and pari passu in the level of earnings of a whole army of Black Country workers. This shifting foundation of earnings and employment was a further powerful obstacle to any growth of labour organisation.

The nailmakers. Where a number of these factors were strongly evident and combined with accelerating secular decline, as in hand nailmaking, the effect was to render lasting union organisation impossible. By the 1860s the decline of nailing in the Black Country was well advanced, the numbers employed falling by more than half between 1830 and 1866 in face of the increasing competitive power of the machine, and the pressure on wages so arising had driven the bulk of the trade into the small towns and industrial villages west of Dudley where wage levels generally were lower.[14] These also varied widely, depending on the type of nail made and the skill and application of the nailer. Horse nail makers could earn up to 25/- per week, but for the general body of nailers earnings ranged between 12/- and 16/- per week for men and between 6/- and 8/- per week for women.[15]

Wages in the nail trade were based, at least nominally, on the list system. This system appears to have originated from the practice, dating back to the latter part of the eighteenth century, of nailmasters meeting together for the purpose of regulating wages and selling prices. Later these prices came to be published in the form of a list which included complete details of the various types of nail, the price at which it would sell and the piece rates of the craftsman. For larger nails payment was by the hundredweight — 'hundredwork' — and for smaller nails by the thousand (in number) — 'thousandwork.'

In practice the smaller nails were also weighed and calculated at so many pounds per thousand nails depending on the type of nail. Once the list was established changes in prices and rates of payment were made by simply adding or deducting a percentage until the list became obsolete and was replaced by another.[16]

Strikes of nailers almost invariably centred round the question of proposed adjustments in the list price in response to changes in trade. In the absence of any continuing nailers' association the organisation of strikes usually devolved upon John Price, of Halesowen. Little is known of Price except that he was a working nailer and that for most of the second half of the nineteenth century he was the acknowledged leader and legal adviser of his fellow workmen.[17] He was usually responsible for initiating strike action and accompanied by a bellman he would then tour the main nailmaking centres to call out his colleagues.

The first general strike of nailers in the 1860s occurred during the summer of 1869, against a proposed reduction in the list of 1864. In mid-September a compromise solution was reached whereby the 1864 prices were maintained with some modifications. The revised list was signed by 43 nailmasters who agreed that anyone on their side who undercut would be prosecuted, and the workmen gave a similar guarantee.[18] It is impossible to establish how far it was necessary to apply these sanctions,

but over the next two years the nail trade remained quiet and it seems probable that there was little undercutting, especially as the developing boom of the early 1870s would sustain the agreed price and wage levels.

As the boom gathered momentum signs of unrest reappeared as the nailers sought an advance on the 1869 list. An initial agitation for an increase of 10% in September 1871 petered out, but it was soon renewed and short lived strikes occurred in a number of towns through the winter and spring of 1872. As the year wore on the continuing rise in iron prices provoked further agitation and in the summer this eventually crystallised into a demand for an advance of 20% on the list of 1869. When the masters resisted this claim a general strike of nailers followed. With prices rising rapidly the masters could not afford a prolonged stoppage and at the same time could well meet the nailers' terms. The full 20% was quickly conceded except by a few of the Sedgley masters and here the strike dragged on for a while, but the claim was finally granted in August.[19]

Brisk activity and relative prosperity kept the trade free from disputes over the next 15 months, but as iron prices reached their peak at the end of 1873 the nailers put in hand a claim for an increase of 15% on the 1872 rates. When the masters offered an advance of only 7½% another general strike ensued but the break in the four year upward movement of prices which came early

in 1874 enabled the masters to resist, and after successively scaling down their demand to 10% and then to 5% the nailers returned to work towards the end of April at the existing prices. At this time it was estimated that the general level of nailmakers' earnings had increased by 40% over the past three years, and those of spike nail makers by up to 50%.[20]

Associated with this brief interruption in the downward trend of nailers' wages were a number of short-lived unions. In the late summer of 1869 a Nail Forgers' Friendly Society was formed, with headquarters at Lye. The subscription was 1d per week for both men and women and strike pay of 7/- per week for men and 3/6 per week for women was envisaged. In the early months of 1870 an Amalgamated Nailmakers' Society enjoyed a brief existence, and in the autumn of 1874 the East Worcestershire and South Staffordshire Thousand Nailmakers' Association was established.[21] In every case these transitory organisations seem to have originated with an agitation or strike and to have terminated abruptly with the settlement of the dispute.

If the strikes and agitations of the early 1870s established no lasting basis of organisation they at least achieved some success in their immediate objective. of securing increased wages. This was possible because they were strikes against the masters, undertaken at a time of improving trade and bringing pressure to bear on

the employers by withholding from them the benefits of rising nail prices. In such a keenly competitive trade once a few masters had conceded the workmen's demands and resumed production the rest would lose large sections of their markets unless they also got their operatives back to work quickly. Consequently such strikes, as well as bringing some measure of success to the strikers, were usually short. Once the course of prices and wages resumed its downward trend from the middle 1870s the characteristic nailers' strike was the strike against the market, undertaken in restriction of output at times of falling wages and prices, full stocks and undercutting. Given the overcrowded state of the labour market in the trade such strikes were usually unsuccessful, in spite of often being very protracted. One such strike in 1877 lasted for 3 months and in the next year a strike of 4 months duration occurred.[22]

With the nail trade in accelerating decline from the middle 1870s the power of the foggers to determine the wage structure increased accordingly until their activities frequently brought about the complete collapse of the list system. In an attempt to remedy this situation there was established in 1880 a Board of Conciliation and Arbitration for the industry, 'to secure by co-operation of masters and workmen a faithful adhesion to the price lists agreed to.' Only 25 out of about 70 masters agreed to abide by its rules and support was similarly lacking on the side of the workmen.

Consequently the board collapsed after only five months and the trade reverted to its former condition whereby the activities of the foggers rather than the official list effectively determined wages.[23]

Similarly, all attempts to seek a solution to the nailers', problem through co-operative production came to nothing. The Lye Distributive Co-operative Society, first registered in 1861, began to employ some of its members at making nails in 1867. By this time it had built up a surplus of a few hundred pounds and proceeded very cautiously in the new departure, selecting only the most sober and trustworthy of its members to take part. As a result it acquired a reputation for good workmanship which enabled it to survive until 1892. Less successful was the Dudley Industrial Nail Manufacturing Society, established in 1879. For the first three years of its existence the Society enjoyed some success, but in 1883 it lost money and from then on its trade and capital quickly dwindled to nothing. Membership was never more than twelve. A Midland Nailmakers' Association was formed in 1884 but within three years its members had abandoned nailmaking in favour of the production of spades and shovels as the growing competitive power of the machine made increasing inroads upon the market for hand made nails.[24] By this time the introduction of the wire nail and improvements in mechanical production were intensifying the decline of hand nailing to the

point of complete collapse and the numbers employed in the trade fell by almost half in the ten years between 1881 and 1891.

The flint-glass makers. By contrast with the nail trade none of the features inimical to organisation were present in the flint-glass trade of Stourbridge and district. The scale of production was small but the domestic element, from which flowed the consequences inhibiting trade unionism among the nailers and other groups, was entirely absent from flint-glass making. The usual establishment consisted of a foundry in which the ingredients for the glass were melted and the products shaped and a grinding and cutting shop in which the articles were embellished with designs and finished, and this precluded home work. Even where the finishing and decorating was carried on in a separate works removed from the foundry a steam engine was required, 'and so garret masters were necessarily excluded.'[25]

A further point of contrast was in the nature of the productive process in the two industries. In nail making the process of manufacture was simplicity itself, requiring merely constant repetition of a single operation. In the glass trade production required the co-ordinated work of a team or 'chair' of four, consisting of the 'workman' or maker, his assistant the 'servitor,' the 'footmaker' or blower and the 'taker-in' or apprentice. Each had a particular function to perform, rising in the

degree of skill required from the taker-in to the workman who completed the article.

The melting process, which took between 36 and 40 hours, was usually begun on Sunday and was followed by a period of between eight and ten hours to allow the 'metal' to cool down to working heat. Once ready the metal had to be used continuously and workers in the foundry were divided into two shifts, which worked in turns of six hours each. The first shift usually began at 6 a.m. on Tuesday and worked till noon, when it was relieved by the second shift which continued until 6 p.m. when the first shift would return. Each shift commonly worked eight 'turns' a week, and with the nominal six hours often reducing to only five in practice the normal working week consisted of a little over 40 hours, ending on Thursday night.[26] The continuous nature of this process, and the precise skills and co-ordinated work required of the operatives prevented any flooding of the glass trade by casual labour and consequently any undercutting of wages from this source.

The typical glass firm of the mid-nineteenth century had ten or eleven chairs and together with those engaged in preparing the materials, firing the furnaces and in cutting and engraving total employment was probably well in excess of 100 per firm. In addition there were also a number of smaller masters in the trade, assisted in some instances by as few as six persons. These small glass

houses or 'cribs' necessarily employed a different productive process from the larger factories, with the smaller quantities of materials being melted at night and worked the following day.[27] Their production usually consisted of the smaller and commoner types of glass ware, so that it was complementary to the production of the larger houses and not in competition with it, again by contrast with nailmaking and some other metal trades where the prices and wages of 'regular' employers were undercut by competition from small owners or domestic workers. This feature of the glass trade was also present in the chain trade and with similar important consequences, which are discussed below.[28]

Finally, the nature of its product and raw materials insulated the glass industry from the cyclical fluctuations of the metal using trades. Combined with steady employment and rising wages following the repeal of the glass duties in 1845 and the general prosperity of the Stourbridge area through the 1850s the special circumstances of the glass trade had, by the early 1860s, given rise to two prosperous unions. The Flint Glass Makers' Union had been formed in Stourbridge in 1851 with 32 members. By the end of 1863 there were 22 branches of the union with 1,485 members and the central secretary reported that the union's affairs had never been 'in a more prosperous condition as regards numbers, funds and position.' The Stourbridge branch was the second largest with 281

members.[29] The growth of the union continued through the 1860s and in 1869 it was calculated that the Flint Glass Makers' Union was the wealthiest trade association in Britain in terms of assets per head of membership. Total assets of £9,127/4/10d were almost £6 per member, compared with a figure of only £2/18/11d per member for the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.[30]

The glass makers were keenly aware that this prosperity depended in large measure on their ability to limit the supply of labour entering the trade, and this had given rise to a long strike in Stourbridge in 1858-59. The dispute developed out of an attempt by some employers to change the established trade practice of having one apprentice to every three chairs to a ratio of one apprentice to two chairs. Most of the Stourbridge glass houses came out and there were sympathetic strikes in Dudley, Birmingham, Manchester, Warrington and St. Helens. During the strike the Stourbridge men received grants of more than £1,337 from the central funds. Together with support from other sources, including £75/14/-d from the glass makers in the U.S.A. and £50 from the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, this enabled the strikers to hold out for seven months before settling on the employers' terms.[31]

In spite of this set-back the Flint Glass Makers' Union remained sufficiently strong in the late 1860s to maintain a considerable element of control over entry to

the trade. When vacancies arose employers filled them by application to the local union secretary who would supply a suitable man from the locality or, if none were available, from a national list. Any employer seeking to circumvent this procedure faced the strong possibility of strike action. Together with the continuing growth in membership of the local branch, which stood at 293 in December 1869, and their association with a buoyant national organisation this raised the situation of the Stourbridge glass makers on to an altogether different plane from that of the general body of Black Country craftsmen.[32]

The only other group of workers to have achieved a comparable position were the glass cutters. The Flint Glass Cutters' Union achieved permanence in 1844 and by 1857 the Stourbridge branch was the largest in the country with 302 members.[33] The growth of both the national union and the Stourbridge branch appears to have continued into the 1860s and the local organisation was strong enough to survive an eight month strike in 1866. Like the makers' strike of eight years earlier this dispute also arose over the apprentice question. The exact circumstances of its origin and settlement are not known but there is nothing to indicate that it seriously weakened the position the union had built up in the industry by the 1860s. This appears to have remained strong until the onset of depression in the mid-1870s undermined the

position of both unions in the glass trade. By 1879 membership of the Flint Glass Cutters' Union in Stourbridge had fallen to 271 and membership in other leading centres was also significantly lower than in earlier years.[34]

Among the glass makers the beginnings of decline in union strength were delayed slightly. In spite of the break in the prosperity of the trade union membership in Stourbridge continued to rise through the later 1870s, reaching 397 in May 1879, compared with 332 in October 1874; but the portents were clear. In 1879 a 7½% wage reduction was imposed by the employers and unemployment pay for the second quarter alone amounted to £341/18/8d. Contributions were raised to 3/- per week for workmen and servitors and 2/- for footmakers, compared with the former subscription of 1/- and 8d per week, and in an attempt to check the drain on resources there was a reduction in the level of superannuation benefit.[35]

The depression of trade continued through the 1880s. The Heath Glasshouse went out of business in 1882, putting almost 400 men out of work, and John Davis and Company, owners of the Dial Glasshouse, went bankrupt in May 1889.

The declining prosperity of the local industry was inevitably reflected in the fortunes of the Stourbridge branch of the union. At the end of 1889 eighty-seven of the 400 members were out of work and 64 were in arrears with subscriptions. Four years later these figures were still 45 and 59 respectively, and it was estimated that even the six years between September 1887 and July 1893 the branch was in deficit to the extent of £1,826/19/-d.[36]

The nut and bolt makers. The manufacture of nuts and bolts did not develop as a separate trade until the 1840s. Prior to this time those engaged in the production of any sort of ironwork had made nuts and bolts to suit their own construction, using hand work methods which had not changed in essentials for centuries. The coming of the railways rendered this traditional method of production quite inadequate, by requiring production in greater quantity and larger dimensions than it could provide and also by making essential some means of securing interchangeable parts. The development of the oliver from the treadle hammer enabled these demands to be met and so created a body of specialist workmen from among the general craftsmen in iron work. By 1845 nut and bolt making was listed in trade directories as a distinct occupation and in 1851 White's History and Gazetteer of Staffordshire stated that Darlaston was famous for its nuts and bolts.[37]

The continually increasing demand for nuts and bolts arising from the growth of the railways and general engineering work led to a rapid expansion of the trade through the 1850s and 1860s, and Birmingham, Smethwick, Blackheath, West Bromwich, Dudley, Bilston and Wolverhampton, as well as Darlaston, had all acquired some share of it by 1870. Rising demand also led to the introduction, in the middle 1850s, of machine methods; and while the initial progress of machinery in the Black

Country centres was slow by the end of the 1860s a significant proportion of the area's total output was being made on machines. Outside the west midlands Manchester, Glasgow and a number of towns in north-east England became the main centres of the trade, but none of these could compete with the Black Country in markets other than those in their own immediate localities. The total production of all other areas was probably less than one-quarter of that of Birmingham and the Black Country towns, which had a virtual monopoly of exports and large railway contracts.

At the beginning of the 1870s the sustained expansion of the trade had given rise in the Black Country to a total workforce of more than 8,000 including boys. These were employed across a spectrum of productive establishments typical of the area. In Darlaston, for example, there were a number of sizeable firms employing up to 100 men each where nuts and bolts were made exclusively on machines, these including the Staffordshire Bolt and Fencing Company formed in 1867 with a capital of £10,000. There were also several smaller factories using both machine and craft methods and employing between 30 and 50 hands each, and a much larger number of small workshops where craftsmen made nuts and bolts on an oliver with the assistance of a hired boy or youth, or of their own families. Sometimes such craftsmen were employed by a small master, sometimes they worked on their own account.[38]

The growth of the industry through the 1860s did not give rise to any lasting form of workmen's organisation. The Darlaston Association for the Suppression of the Tommy System, which included some nut and bolt workers, enjoyed a fleeting existence in 1867,[39] but not until three years later was a trade union established and only then under pressures generated indirectly by general legislation. These arose from the enactment in 1867 of the Workshops Act and the Factory Acts Extension Act, which together had the effect of bringing many of the small workshops of the Black Country under the control of the factory inspectorate for the first time. The Acts limited the hours of women and young persons to ten per day and 58 per week, prohibited the employment of boys under the age of 13, and required that any boys employed must have a medical certificate as evidence that they were of the requisite age and fit enough to do the work involved. These provisions were particularly damaging to the nut and bolt forgers. The restrictions on boy labour raised their costs appreciably and in addition many employers began to deduct from their crafts-men's wages the full doctor's fee of 1/- for the medical certificate, in defiance of the legally permitted maximum of 3d. Some employers went further and after retaining a doctor to carry out the examinations at a flat rate fee required that a new certificate must be obtained every time a boy changed shops or even moved his place of work within

the same shop, so that in one case medical examination fees were paid 14 times in a single year in respect of one particular boy.[40]

In consequence of these abuses a meeting of some 200 nut and bolt forgers was held at the Temperance Hall, Darlaston on 16 August 1870, where the speakers included Richard Juggins, a native of Darlaston who, at the age of only 28, had already had 20 years experience in the nut and bolt trade. At this meeting it was unanimously resolved 'to give 14 days notice to the masters that (the nut and bolt forgers of Darlaston) will no longer submit to the system of deducting 1/- for the examination of boys, but that they will be responsible for 3d according to the clauses of the Factory Acts.'[41] Notice was duly given, expiring on 3 September, but the employers refused to comply with its terms and on 9 November the operatives brought a test case on the legality of the 1/- deduction before Wolverhampton magistrates' court.

In this case William Beach, a nut and bolt forger, sued his late employer, Mr. Wilkes, for the sum of 9d which he alleged to have been unlawfully deducted from his wages. In evidence it was stated that nut and bolt forgers employed by the defendant each paid a boy to work the bellows and to assist them generally. The boys had to be examined by a surgeon who was paid an annual fee of £10 by the defendant for carrying out this duty. To recoup this sum Wilkes charged the workmen 1/- for every such examination, but in August the forgers had given two

weeks notice that they would no longer submit to this charge and would pay only the 3d required by Act of Parliament. Giving judgement, Mr. magistrate Spooner stated that the law was ambiguous. The charge of 3d need not necessarily be deducted from the wages of the workmen but could equally well be deducted from the wages of those to whom certificates were granted, i.e. the boys. Arrangements for payment of the charge were a matter for agreement between employers and their workmen and since the men had taken no action on the expiry of their fortnights notice in September the former implicit agreement, that they submitted to a charge of 1/- being levied on themselves, must stand and he therefore found in favour of the defendant, Wilkes. He sympathised with the workmen in their grievance, but the court could provide no redress under the law as it stood.[42]

Unable to resolve their situation by recourse to law the men decided to organise and two days after the court hearing a meeting of nut and bolt forgers in the Temperance Hall, Darlaston, agreed that a Nut and Bolt Forgers' Protection Society be formed. The subscription was set at 3d per week and it was resolved that the society should continue as long as there were three members.[43] There was no statement at this meeting about eligibility for membership but it seems clear that the association was intended to include only the hand forgers or olivermen. The machine workers in the larger

factories were not involved in the dispute over payment for medical certificates, and the union certainly developed purely as a craft workers society. Nor does it appear that any officials were appointed at this inaugural meeting, but the key position of general secretary was quickly filled by Richard Juggins and the work of active recruitment began.

By this time the first onset of the great iron boom was pushing demand and prices in the trade steadily higher. With improving trade enthusiasm for organisation spread quickly and in January 1871 a second branch of the society was established in Smethwick. By June the union felt strong enough to demand the dismissal of 20 non-unionists employed by the Patent Nut and Bolt Company in Smethwick. When the company refused to comply a strike ensued but this quickly collapsed in face of the company's declared intention of standing firm.[44] This set-back, however, proved to be only temporary and the union's challenge to the employers was soon renewed.

In December 1871 the larger employers in the trade introduced the 54 hour week into their factories. The smaller owners quickly followed but as Richard Juggins saw only 'because the cost did not come out of the employers' pockets.' To compensate the craftsmen for the shorter working week the employers offered a 10% increase on their piece rates but Juggins insisted that this 'would not do.' It was insufficient to offset the reduction

in hours, he claimed, and would involve a fall in earnings for many olivermen, and these were already only 20/- per week in many cases.[45] It was accordingly decided that 'the list of prices received from the Employers' Association be discountenanced and rejected with contempt.' The men then presented the employers with their own list, involving increases of up to 25% in piece rates and the elimination of certain anomalies in the existing prices. Predictably, this was rejected and the employers countered by demanding that all workers discontinue their association with the Nut and Bolt Makers' Protection Society. Encouraged by an increasingly acute labour shortage in the trade and the steady growth in membership over recent months the union brought its Darlaston men out on strike. The employers responded by locking out the Smethwick men and announcing that the resumption of work would be accompanied by the introduction of rules imposing deductions from wages of 3/- per week and 6d per week respectively for supplying blast and providing a boy to carry breezes, and a fine of 3d for every hour in excess of two lost by employees.[46]

At the outset it seemed unlikely that the union could sustain a long dispute. No strike fund had been built up and there was no national organisation from which to obtain support. Similarly, the absence of union organisation in other Black Country trades meant that little help was likely to be forthcoming from the surrounding towns. Further, it seemed certain that the non-union

machine operators in the larger factories would remain at work so that there would be no rapid running down of stocks.

Encouraged by the obvious weakness of the union's position some employers brought further pressure to bear by announcing that on termination of the dispute work would only be offered to those who signed this document:

> In consideration of your employing me at your works I hereby agree to work for you at the prices, and to observe the rules of the Bolt, Nut, Rivet and Railway Fastening Manufactories Association, which prices and rules are set forth in the price list which is now posted at your works. And I declare that I am not a member of the Nut and Bolt Makers' Protection And Death Society of Darlaston, Smethwick and District, and that I am not a member of any other society or union of nut and bolt workers and that I will not become a member of or join any such society as long as I remain in your employ.[47]

Richard Juggins's employer went further and announced that no matter what terms might be agreed for a general return to work Juggins himself would not be re-engaged, but these moves only served to harden the men's attitude and so ensure the prolongation of the dispute. An attempt to resolve the position was made in the middle of March when a conference of employers and workmen was held under the chairmanship of William Avery, the Birmingham alderman, but this ended in deadlock and the strike dragged on.[48] In early April some of the Smethwick men began to drift back to work but this was checked by the prompt action of Juggins and his executive council and the men remained united in their resistance until the

middle of May, when a second conference between the two sides was called. After three days of discussion, 'mutual concessions having been made,' an agreement was reached as follows:

1. There would be established in the trade a uniform price list for each class of work, generally 'at a good advance on prices previously given.'

2. The proposed charges for supplying blast and carrying breezes would be scaled down to 1/6 per week and 4d per week respectively.

3. The doors of workshops would not be locked against workmen until half an hour after the commencement of work, i.e. until 6.30 am.[49]

The agreement was signed by Richard Juggins for the union and Edward Carter for the employers, and after 17 weeks the strike was over.

Juggins's personal situation was resolved by his becoming full time secretary of the union, a position he held until his death 23 years later. Such was the prestige he had achieved by his conduct of the strike that he was also, 'at the suggestion of the largest employer we have in the trade,' appointed the official arbitrator in the nut and bolt trade, surely a unique distinction for a trade union official. He held this position for five years, giving his decisions 'upon a straight line as far as my judgement and knowledge went,' until the changing circumstances of the trade required the appointment of an independent arbitrator.[50]

Juggins set about the task of building up the union with characteristic energy and thoroughness. He established a branch in Sheffield in 1873 and another one

in Manchester the following year, when the union was renamed the National Amalgamated Association of Nut and Bolt Workers. Other organising successes followed and at the union's bi-annual conference in Manchester in March 1875 there were delegates from 29 branches in places as far apart as Accrington, Sunderland, Cwmbran and London. Juggins was able to report an increase of £943/13/9d in the financial balance and total funds of £2,570/13/9d. Membership had increased by 549 during the year, to a total of 1,776, and the number of branches had grown from 15 to 31. By July 1876 another 3 branches had been established and a further 140 members enrolled, and the association was publishing its own newspaper, the Nut and Bolt Journal.[51]

These successes were achieved despite the fact that trade was not always good in Darlaston, where there was the biggest concentration of olivermen and union strength. The effects of foreign competition were now being felt with increasing severity by the industry generally, and particularly by the craft workers, and in the early months of 1877 worsening trade began to undermine the position of the union. Juggins's report to the bi-annual conference in Birmingham in April revealed that while there had been an increase of £1,169/15/5½d in total wealth and seven new branches had been formed, three branches had broken up, including the one in Wolverhampton, and total membership had fallen by 211.[52]

Faced with falling prices in the product market the Black Country employers called on their operatives to accept a new list of piece rates to replace that of 1872. Juggins estimated that the new rates would reduce earnings by up to 30% in some cases, and the list was rejected out of hand by the men. At a meeting of the two sides in Birmingham on 10 May the men's representatives argued that the circumstances of the trade, as shown by the published profits of some leading firms, were not such as to justify a reduction and when they again declined to discuss the proposed new list the employers gave notice to lock-out the men.[53]

Both sides prepared for a protracted struggle. The employers had sufficient stocks to carry them through a long period and the workmen were in good spirits, encouraged by the growth of the union since 1872 and the confidence of Juggins that the dispute would have a successful outcome. A reserve fund of over £3,700 enabled the executive council of the union to declare strike pay of 10/- per week for members plus 1/- per week for every child under 14 for the first week, reducing to 8/- plus 1/- per week thereafter. Juggins also succeeded in obtaining some financial support from the Manchester, Chowbent and Oldham branches of the union, and this was augmented by workers in other trades in the Manchester area.[54]

As the lock-out entered its second month some

weakening appeared on the side of the owners and a few establishments reopened at the 1872 prices but in general both sides held firm through July and into August, when it was agreed that the dispute be referred to arbitration. This agreement immediately broke down when the employers insisted that the men return at the new, reduced rates pending the arbitrator's decision while the men refused to go back except at the 1872 prices or a wage of 5/4d per nine hour day, and the struggle dragged on until the end of October when Joseph Chamberlain was appointed as a mutually acceptable arbitrator. His award involved reductions of between 5% and 15% on the 1872 list and maintenance of the existing level of deductions for blast and breezes. He also suggested that the increasingly complex nature of the product required the appointment of an independent arbitrator, and having found that 'it is impossible for an arbitrator to please both parties ----- and that the men considered that I ought to give them a verdict whether they were right or wrong,' Juggins was readily able to agree. The other terms were also accepted and after being locked out for five months the men returned to work.[55]

The scaling down of the proposed reductions and establishment of the principle of independent arbitration in their trade represented a considerable success for the nut and bolt workers but its achievement had cost their union dearly. The annual statement of accounts for the

year ending January 1878 showed that expenditure had reached the unprecedented sum of £6,466/0/11d, of which £5,373/14/1d was strike pay. The union's initial funds had been supplemented by grants of £713/5/4½d from various trade societies and levies of £1,445/11/9d but it had still had to draw on branch and bank funds to the extent of £3,702/18/3d.[56]

This set-back was reflected in some further decline of membership but the basis of organisation remained strong enough as the union entered its second decade for it to mount an agitation for a revision of the 1877 price list. Like earlier lists this had quickly been made obsolescent by the continually increasing range and complexity of the product. Under the guidance of Richard Chamberlain, who had succeeded his brother as arbitrator when Joseph became President of the Board of Trade in May 1880, a new list was finalised in August 1881. This eliminated some anomalies from the 1877 list and included new products, and it represented a definite improvement for the craftsmen. The introduction of the new list brought an increase in membership of the Nut and Bolt Makers' Association, but it also coincided with a temporary recession in the trade and some of the Darlaston employers refused to pay the new scale. A partial strike ensued but the recovery of prices prevented this from developing into a protracted dispute, and by the end of the year the new list was being operated by all the Black Country employers.[57]

Prices continued to rise through 1882 and in the autumn the operatives were granted wage increases ranging from 10% to 15%. Trade continued good through most of 1883 but by the end of the year the effects of competition from Belgium and Germany and from new British firms, such as the Workington Rivet and Bolt Company, were being felt with increasing severity in the Black Country. In the early months of 1884 prices began to weaken and some employers began to undercut official list prices. The union was not in a position to check this, having expended most of its funds in recent disputes in other areas, and by the end of the year undercutting was widespread in both Darlaston and Smethwick.[58]

This development, in fact, marked the beginning of secular decline in the nut and bolt trade. In other Black Country metal trades the process of decline was already well advanced, and superimposed on their particular industrial structure this had the effect of undermining such trade union organisation as existed and adding a further obstacle to its appearance where it did not. Richard Juggins was fully aware of this situation. As the only professional organiser in the Black Country metal trades he was frequently called upon to act as spokesman and negotiator for groups other than the nut and bolt workers, and the experience of the past 14 years had convinced him not only of the necessity for

organisation within trades, but also of the need for some wider form of organisation to buttress particular unions by strengthening them in direct negotiations with employers and by seeking the enactment of protective legislation.

One such 'umbrella' organisation was the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Trades Council which had been established in August 1882 with headquarters at Cradley Heath. The craftsmen represented at the inaugural meeting included the cable chain makers, the small chain makers, the rivet makers, the wrought nail makers, the anchorsmiths, the sheet ironworkers, the hammer makers and, somewhat surprisingly, the flint glass makers. In the past the attitude of the glassmakers to any association with groups such as the nailers and chainmakers had varied between suspicion and outright hostility, but with the onset of depression in their own trade beginning to undermine the membership and finances of their union they were willing to explore possibilities of obtaining support from other trades. Charles Williams of the Horsenail Makers' Protection Society was elected secretary of the new Trades Council, William Husselbee of the flint glass makers became president and J. Humphries treasurer.[59] Rules modelled on those of the Birmingham Trades Council were drawn up, and the council at once moved to secure legislation to restrict the employment of female labour in the nail and chain trades.

There is nothing to indicate that Juggins took any part in the formation of the South Staffordshire Trades Council but he was quickly involved in securing support from local MPs and the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. for its proposed measure, and in March 1883 Henry Broadhurst introduced into the House of Commons a Bill to restrict the employment of women workers in iron works and forges.[60] The Bill was not successful and the Trades Council immediately broke up in consequence, but Juggins remained convinced of the need for some form of organisation which would discipline labour by fostering the growth of unionism or by securing legislation and so eliminate the worst consequences arising from the increasingly overcrowded labour market in many trades, and in 1885 and 1886 he took two important initiatives.

The first of these was in his own industry, where the response of employers to the deteriorating trade of 1884 was to seek a 10% wage reduction. Juggins convened a series of meetings between the employers and leaders of the Nut and Bolt Workers' Association in January and February 1885 and from these meetings there emerged the beginnings of the 'alliance philosophy.' The essence of this was embodied in two resolutions adopted at the last of these meetings, on 16 February, as follows:

> 1. The time has now arrived when there should be complete union between the employers and workmen engaged in the nut and bolt trade.

> 2. The action of employers and workmen outside the trade association is seriously injuring the prospects of the trade and if continued will lead to a further reduction in prices and wages; the employers should employ none but associated workmen and workmen should work only for associated employers.[61]

The date set for acceptance of this agreement was 3 April, and through March the union brought out its men from a number of works whose owners were not members of the Employers' Association until by the end of the month only James Wiley, the owner of the Eagle Works in Darlaston, where about 25 men were employed, stood outside. The Birmingham Trades Council now threw its weight behind the union but Wiley adamantly refused to join the association and on 4 April the associated masters duly gave 14 days notice of the 10% reduction, with a promise that this would be restored when prices recovered. At a further meeting with the employers the union succeeded in getting the reduction scaled down to 5% and it became effective at the end of April.[62]

Juggins's second initiative was more broadly conceived and was initially inspired by the spread into the Black Country of the American organisation, the Knights of Labour. This organisation was founded in Philadelphia in 1869 and grew rapidly in the U.S.A. through the 1870s and into the first half of the 1880s.[63] The first British local assembly of the Knights appears to have been established in Cardiff in 1883 and by January 1885 a preceptory, or branch, with about 120 members had

been formed in West Bromwich.[64] Membership of this branch was largely confined to the window glass makers employed at Chance's Glass Works in Spon Lane but a number of mixed assemblies, accepting members from all trades and occupations, were quickly formed in other Black Country towns. The willingness of the Knights to 'invite the outcast common labourer'[65] had an obvious appeal to the largely unorganised workmen of the Black Country, and their dislike of strike action and preference for arbitration was in line with Richard Juggins's own thinking. He accordingly welcomed the growth of the Knights in the Black Country as possibly providing the basis for the type of broadly based organisation he was seeking to establish. This did not in fact prove to be the case but Juggins's flirtation with the Knights did lead to the formation of a much more substantial and durable organisation, in the form of the Midland Counties Trades Federation.

Notes to Chapter Seven on pages 516-519

C H A P T E R E I G H T

CRAFT UNIONISM: CLIMAX AND DECLINE 1886-1914

The Midland Counties Trades Federation. The first positive step towards establishing the Midland Counties Trades Federation was taken on Wednesday 24 March 1886 when a delegate meeting of various trades was convened at the offices of the Nut and Bolt Makers' Association in New Street, Darlaston. Richard Juggins took the chair and addressed the meeting on 'the advisability of some scheme whereby the whole of the trades in the Midlands might become federated.' He was supported by John Taylor, secretary to the Dudley Anvil Makers' Society and, a formal resolution approving the principle of federation was carried unanimously. Delegates who had not already done so were instructed to take the opinion of their trades on this question and report their findings to a further meeting on 7 April. No record of this meeting has yet been traced but the response to Juggins's proposal was presumably favourable, for on 21 April a mass meeting of trades was held in Darlaston 'for the purpose of considering a system of federation for all Trades Societies or the advisability of joining the Knights of Labour in America.' In a forceful speech Juggins drove home the message of organisation and solidarity, and it was unanimously resolved that a federation be formed. This decision was endorsed at a

second mass meeting in Smethwick on 5 May, and accordingly on Wednesday 12 May the Midland Counties Trades Federation was inaugurated. The initial membership was just a few hundred, drawn from only three societies — The Nut and Bolt Makers, the Dudley Anvil Makers and the Walsall Chain Makers. Richard Juggins was elected secretary and John Taylor president.[1]

The stated aims of the established Federation closely reflected Juggins's original conception of it as an organisation which, by embracing a large number of workers in a variety of trades, could to some extent redress the unequal balance between employers and small isolated groups of craftsmen, and use the authority of its larger numbers to press for parliamentary action.[2] Ability to carry the first of these aims into practice was demonstrated immediately, in the protracted small chainmakers' strike of 1886-7. This began in August 1886 and lasted for almost 18 months. Only the support channelled through the Federation enabled the chainmakers to sustain the strike for so long and while the immediate objective, the 3/6d list, was not achieved the publicity surrounding the dispute brought greater benefits in the longer term: by awakening public conscience to the chainmakers' plight.[3] Annie Besant, Sir Charles Dilke and other MPs of all parties took up the chainmakers' cause and their support for the Federation's continuing agitation was a main factor ensuring that the Chain Trade Board was amongst

the first four created under the Trade Boards Act of 1909.[4]

Similarly, the new Federation achieved some notable successes in direct wage negotiations with employers. These were due to the existence of the Federation making possible the introduction of a new element into the structure of wage negotiation, namely mutual support by different trades sometimes with the further assistance of groups of workers from outside the Black Country. Shortly after the affiliation of the gun lock filers, for example, the Federation succeeded in raising the price for filing locks from 3½d per lock to 5d, and then to 7d. To obtain these advances it had to bring the workmen out on strike briefly, during which time sufficient financial support was obtained from affiliated societies and from the Enfield and Small Heath arms workers to pay the strikers 5/6 per week, 'almost as much as they got when at work.'[5] The success of this first attempt at co-ordinated action in wage negotiation encouraged others and during the Federation's first three years substantial wage increases were secured for the gun lock makers, the spike nail makers, the rivet makers and the Wednesbury tube makers.

The Federation's success in organising a broad basis of support and so strengthening the position of workers in wage negotiations had another and possibly more important consequence. By reducing the ability of employers to keep costs down by 'squeezing' wages it forced them to seek the co-operation of labour in maintaining

their position in increasingly competitive markets, and so opened the way to acceptance of conciliation as the basis of wage settlement. In this the authority of the Federation was also quickly established. At the third Annual Conference Juggins reported that there had been a total of 82 deputations to employers during the year. By the next year this number had risen to 160.[6]

In some trades the new spirit of co-operation was carried further with the adoption of the alliance philosophy. This had been foreshadowed in the nut and bolt trade as early as 1885 but its practical implementation was effectively prevented at that time by the inability of employers and union to prevent undercutting. The success of the Federation in strengthening organisation and discipline among the workmen encouraged Juggins to take a new initiative, and at a meeting of employers and union representatives in the Queen's Hotel, Birmingham, in February 1889, the Staffordshire Nut and Bolt Wages Board was formed.[7] It was composed of six representatives from each side, with the chairman being chosen from among the employers, and was invested with power to decide all changes in the established list of prices and wages. In the event of agreement within the board proving impossible there was provision for reference to a single arbitrator appointed by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham or by the board itself. In addition, and this was the distinctive feature of the alliance philosophy, the board had power to use its

financial resources, provided equally by the two sides, to support any workmen or employers affected by undercutting of wages or prices.

In the 1890s where there was effective discipline on both sides of the trade many other Black Country craftsmen were able to establish similar wages boards. The anchorsmiths of Cradley Heath and Dudley, the awl-blade makers of Bloxwich, the harness and saddlery makers of Walsall and the Dudley fender makers were just four such groups. Some of these boards survived into the 1930s and were only terminated with the final extinction of the craft which they served.

These early successes of the Federation were reflected in the growth of its membership and finances. By the end of its first year membership had increased from the original few hundred to about 1,000. Within a further three years this figure had grown to 10,000, drawn from 66 affiliated societies, and at the time of the fifth Annual Conference in 1891 membership was 14,000. The financial strength of the Federation also grew steadily during its early years. The subscription was 1d per week per member, payable via the affiliated society. In the Federation's first year this produced a total income of £178/1/10d and a credit balance of £103/17/3½d. In the third year income increased to £507/9/2½d and expenditure amounted to £308/18/4d, which included £144/17/-d strike pay. At the fifth Annual Conference it was reported that

both income and expenditure had topped £1,000 for the first time. Income was £1,228/11/2½d and expenditure had risen to £1,108/19/7d, including £718/18/5d strike pay.[8]

These amounts appear trivial in comparison with the funds of such societies as the A.S.E., the Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners, or even the Flint Glass Makers but they were adequate for the Federation's purposes. Administrative costs were minimal and the constant emphasis on conciliation meant that strike pay, while usually the largest single item of expenditure, never became an excessive drain on resources. At the same time strike pay from the Federation could provide benefits quite disproportionate to the actual sums of money involved, for two reasons. First, no more than one or two affiliated unions would need to call on the Federation's funds at any one time. Frequently their own resources, though small, could sustain them through a short dispute and many constituent associations never called a strike throughout the whole period of the Federation's existence. The Federation's funds could thus be concentrated and so give substantial help to those societies whose own finances were inadequate; in 1891, for example, it was able to give £400 in strike pay to the Cradley Heath chainmakers and £216 to the tube fitting makers of Wednesbury.[9] Second, the membership of individual societies was frequently very small. Associations

such as those of the fire-iron makers, the nail casters, the spring trap makers and the hame makers usually had fewer than one hundred members. For unions such as these even small sums could provide substantial relief for members whose wages when at work were often desperately low.

The Federation's first five years were thus a period of solid achievement. The number of affiliated societies increased from three to 66 and membership from a few hundred to 14,000, and there was a commensurate growth in financial strength. A number of strikes were carried through successfully and the strengthening of labour organisation paved the way for the acceptance of conciliation procedures and the establishment of wages boards, which were to become a main feature of industrial relations in the Black Country over the next two decades. As a direct result of the formation of the Federation a large number of Black Country craftsmen were for the first time obtaining some of the benefits of organisation.

In the early 1890s the fortunes of the Federation suffered a set-back. At the eighth Annual Conference in 1894 only 4,000 members were represented and the auditor's report showed a deficit of £83 on the year's working, the first so recorded.[10] Progress was quickly resumed, however, and over the six years following 1894 the Federation grew to its greatest numerical strength and the peak of its power and influence. In 1897 membership again reached the figure of 14,000 recorded in 1891 and

by 1900 it was touching 20,000. The finances of the Federation also recovered, and at the fourteenth Annual Conference a gain on the year's working of £1,387/12/7½d was reported. At this time the total worth of the Federation stood at just over £4,359 and the capital of its 45 affiliated societies at £23,446/2/10d.[11]

During these years the Federation's main activity continued to be direct wage negotiation on behalf of member societies. In 1901 John Taylor, who had succeeded Richard Juggins as secretary on Juggins's death in 1895, reported to the fifteenth Annual Conference that to date over 12,000 deputations had been sent to employers at a cost to the Federation of some £2,000. As a result throughout the whole period of the Federation's existence only £3,670 had been expended in strike pay, while in the past two years alone it had been directly responsible for putting over £80,000 in the pockets of its members in the form of increased wages.[12]

Growth of the Federation's industrial function was accompanied by a considerable expansion of its role as a parliamentary pressure group. During the first decade of its existence the leaders of the Federation had concentrated largely on developing it as an organisation for co-ordinating the activities of member associations and establishing its position as an authoritative negotiating body. The successful lock-out of the A.S.E. by the engineering employers in 1897-8 and the verdict in the Taff Vale case,

together with its own growing authority resulted in the Federation placing greater emphasis on parliamentary action and increasingly from the turn of the century delegations from the Federation were to be found waiting on MPs and government ministers.

The subjects of their representation were of two kinds — those of general application to conditions in the Black Country, such as need to impose restrictions on the employment of women, and those relating to abuses in particular industries. If it is impossible to state precisely just how important the voice of the Federation was in influencing government policy on such matters there can be little doubt that it was a considerable factor. The part played by the Federation in securing the inclusion of chainmaking in the Trade Boards Act of 1909 has already been noted. It was equally prominent in obtaining the inclusion of a clause in the Truck Act of 1896 making deductions for blast and hire of tools illegal; and in securing the application of the Particulars Clause of the 1901 Factory Act to outworkers in the lock and chain trades.

The years around the turn of the century marked the high point of the Federation's strength. From the peak in 1900 membership declined rapidly. In 1904 it was only 5,689 and by 1911 it had fallen to 3,236. Thereafter it recovered somewhat, helped by the stimulus given to labour organisation generally by stirring events of 1912-13, but

on the eve of the Great War it stood at only 4,684.[13] Falling membership was, inevitably, accompanied by declining authority but the reputation the Federation had built in better times ensured that it remained an industrial and parliamentary force.

This was demonstrated many times. In July 1909 a strike began in the block chain trade when some employers declared they would not pay the wage rates it was proposed should operate from the establishment of the new Chain Trade Board in January 1910. The strike lasted until the end of January when rates were finally agreed through the 'good offices' of the Federation. Also in 1910 the Federation successfully opposed the imposition of a duty on vermin traps entering Nigeria, which would have seriously damaged the interests of the Wednesfield trap makers. During the following year the Federation succeeded in establishing an organisation in the hame making trade, consequent on which the craftsmen secured wage increases of up to 30%. Two years after this, in 1913, it was instrumental in obtaining a 10% wage advance in each of the lock, block chain and tube trades.[14]

These successes could not, however, obscure the irreversible decline of the Federation's former authority. This was due to its reluctance to adapt to the far reaching changes that were transforming the industrial structure of the Black Country.

Increasingly from about 1900 machine processes were

introduced into the metal using trades of south Staffordshire, displacing the craftsmen using traditional hand-work methods. This was largely true of both expanding and declining industries. Thus in both the nut and bolt and screw industries the labour force almost doubled between 1891 and 1911 but during this period 'both the Darlaston and Smethwick trades were swept into the range of the new engineering industries, which were just beginning their great period of expansion.'[15] In consequence the number of craftsmen employed in the nut and bolt trade fell to less than 1,000 in 1914. In the lock trade, where expansion was much less dramatic, a similar development took place as pressing and stamping replaced handicraft methods in the production of the older types of lock, and as the American cylinder lock, which involved a highly mechanised productive process, increasingly displaced these older types. As a result the number of craftsmen in the lock trade had fallen to 1,000 by 1908, which was only one-fifth of the figure of 40 years earlier.[16]

By contrast with both of these industries the nail trade of the Black Country contracted sharply, as machine manufacture was transformed first by the displacement of wrought iron by mild steel and then by the encroachment of the cheaper wire nail on markets previously served by the cut nail. The first of these developments meant that Black Country manufacturers lost their former advantage of proximity to a main source of raw materials. The

second meant that other centres of production in Britain and abroad, where the production of wire nails was more firmly established than in south Staffordshire, quickly displaced the West Midlands as a main source of supply. In consequence by 1911 the total number of persons engaged in nail manufacture in Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire was only 3,200, compared with 14,800 twenty years earlier. Of these 3,200 rather more than one-third were hand nailers, engaged in making particular types such as spike and brush nails to which machinery had not yet been successfully adapted.[17]

The displacement of craftsmen by machinery had two important consequences for industrial relations. First, by increasing the size of the industrial unit it destroyed the peculiarly intimate relationship between employers and workmen which had been so characteristic of the Black Country metal trades in previous decades. Second, it created in ever increasing numbers a new type of machine minder or handyman worker. The unionism of the Federation, limited to craftsmen and essentially pacific in attitude, was unable to comprehend these changes and was superseded.

The steady erosion of the face to face relationship between employers and craftsmen meant that the Federation was increasingly faced by employers who were remote and anonymous. This development rendered the Federation's method of seeking to settle disputes through direct and immediate negotiation inappropriate and difficult to apply

in practice, and its reluctance to seek and apply the procedures appropriate to the new conditions meant that it came to play a much diminished role in industrial relations. In many industries the wages boards, which the Federation had been largely responsible for bringing into existence, continued but these now covered a smaller and smaller proportion of the workforce and consequently lost much of their former importance.

The failure to make provision for the growing body of machine workers meant that in those industries in which such workers came to form the major part of the labour force the craft unions of the Federation became increasingly irrelevant and eventually lost their hold on the craftsmen for whom they were intended. Thus by 1907 the National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers had recruited about 200 nut and bolt craftsmen in the Blackheath, Halesowen and Old Hill districts, and by 1913 its influence in the nut and bolt trade had become so extensive that it was recognised by the Darlaston employers as the union with which they would negotiate.[18] Similarly for all its efforts to secure legislation for the regulation of female labour the Federation never made any attempt to organise the growing number of women workers. In lock making for example there was 'a great increase in the proportion of female labour between 1901 and 1911,' and by 1911 the majority of the workers employed in screw manufacture were women.[19] The organisation of

women workers was left to the National Federation of Women Workers, established by Mary Macarthur in 1906, so that the considerable expansion of trade unionism among women by-passed the Midland Federation completely. Thus it is estimated that by 1914 over 1,000 women employed in the nut and bolt manufacture belonged to the National Women's Federation.[20]

The Federation's inflexibility derived from the nature of the trades which it sought to organise. These were technically very simple and work usually involved merely the repetition of a few basic operations, requiring little more than normal manual dexterity and co-ordination on the part of the operative, so that the workforce in these trades possessed 'merely the general value of labour.'[21] The unionism of the Federation was thus much more akin to 'general' unionism than to orthodox craft unionism, particularly in its 'residual' function of seeking to organise those workers not effectively covered by unions of the established craft type, and it shared with the general unions an important characteristic consequent on this, namely a rapid turnover of membership.[22]

The Federation had a hard core of associations which remained in continuous membership over long periods, such as those of the nut and bolt makers, the Dudley anvil makers and the locksmiths but there was a much larger number of societies whose affiliation, and indeed existence, was only transitory. This feature is clearly

apparent both during the period of the Federation's growth in the 1890s and in its decline after 1900. Between 1889 and 1901 the number of affiliated societies varied between 35 and 66, and between 1904 and 1913 the number ranged from 15 to 36. Similarly, of 45 unions belonging to the Federation in 1889 only about half were still in membership by 1896, while more than 20 new associations joined between these dates.[23]

The instability of the Federation's membership had the effect, as it also had in many general unions, of concentrating power in the hands of the leadership. First, it meant that decisions of the executive council were rarely challenged. Second, it gave rise to the development of an 'inner cabinet' within this council. The executive council consisted of the president, vice president, treasurer and secretary, and ten members, all elected at the annual conference. Inevitably the officers of the Federation were elected almost exclusively from delegates of the hard core associations and normally held office for fairly lengthy periods. The council members other than the officers tended to be elected largely from among representatives of those societies whose membership of the Federation lasted for only a few years, and consequently they served for a relatively short time. Thus of ten members elected to the executive council in 1903 only five were still members in 1905 and by 1908 only three remained. Sometimes no election was necessary as

there were only as many nominees as there were positions to fill, and in 1901 only nine names were initially put forward for the ten places.[24]

As a result decision making in the Federation was effectively concentrated in the hands of a small coterie of officials drawn from constituent unions of long standing and in particular in the hands of the only paid officer, the general secretary. On the death of Richard Juggins in 1895 John Taylor was elected to this office and retained it unchallenged until the Federation was finally wound up in 1940. A Dudley man by birth and upbringing Taylor was an archetypical figure among Black Country trade union leaders of his generation. Massive, self righteous integrity and a wide streak of insularity combined to produce in him a very narrow conception of the legitimate organisation and functions of trade unions. Thus in 1914 he insisted that 'the difficulties in organisation' which the Federation faced were

> created by the numerous societies in existence, who cater for all classes of labour, irrespective of the knowledge they possess of the trades they invite to join them — a sort of muddling up of different crafts. These societies have a small entrance fee and small contributions and they become very attractive to some people. There are some people who like cheap things — bargains so called — and there are those who offer them, who know at the same time these bargains are only for a bait. We dissent from this practice. We prefer to say to men what they ought to do, and what they ought to pay, in order to put their societies on a sound financial basis. This plain speaking loses us members. Better to do so than build them up with false hopes; to constantly have to appeal to the public.[25]

This reluctance to accept the new unionism even after its dramatic successes of the previous year was strongly indicative of Taylor's rigid attitudes. The unionism of the Federation inevitably reflected the outlook of its chief spokesman and executive officer and its inflexibility in face of a rapidly changing industrial situation ensured its decline as an effective organisation.

The Midland Counties Trades Federation 1886-1914

Membership and Finances

Year	Membership	Income	Expenditure
		£ s. d.	£ s. d.
1888	1,700	283 7 2½	158 11 11
1891	14,000	1,228 11 2½	1,108 19 7
1894	4,000	832 8 5½	916 2 4
1897	14,000	842 3 8	339 5 9*
1900	19,500	1,949 2 1	561 9 5½
1903	7,300	3,596 6 6½	4,290 19 11½†
1905	3,150	969 12 6½	810 13 11
1908	2,400	623 11 3½	410 19 11
1911	3,250	464 16 1	367 17 0
1914	4,700	1,386 8 1	916 11 3½

The figures for membership are those reported by the Credentials Committee, of members actually represented at the Annual Conference, rounded off to the nearest 50.

*For the seven months June-December 1897, consequent on the Federation's financial year being altered to run from 1 January to 31 December, instead of 1 June-31 May.

†The figure for income includes £1,850 strike pay, received from the General Federation of Trade Unions, Expenditure includes £3,451 10s strike pay, £2,549 of this being paid to the locksmiths of Wolverhampton and Willenhall who were involved in a ten-week strike.

The Knights of Labour. The decline of the Midland Counties Federation was anticipated or reflected by the fortunes of the craft organisations which pre-dated its formation. The most spectacular decline was that of the Knights of Labour. This organisation reached the peak of its strength in the Black Country at the end of the 1880s when there were in existence a district assembly centred on Cradley Heath, and local assemblies at West Bromwich, Smethwick, Sedgley, Walsall and Bloxwich.[26]

The success of the Knights was largely due to the vigorous leadership of Jesse Chapman and Haydn Sanders. Chapman was the headmaster of an elementary school in Smethwick, a good public speaker and an able organiser. He played a prominent part in establishing the Midland Counties Federation and then became Master Workman of Knights Local Assembly 10227, formed in Smethwick in May 1887. Haydn Sanders was the owner of a small lockmaking business in Walsall and the Master Workman of Local Assembly 454, probably founded in 1888. He was also a leading figure in the Walsall Socialist Club and was elected to the Town Council in 1888 as a Social Democratic candidate. His strong personality attracted a number of small local unions, such as the Bridle Bit Forgers' and Filers' Society and the Saddle-tree Makers' Association, into joining the Knights and by November 1889 their organisation in Walsall was strong enough to run two candidates in the municipal elections.

Neither was successful, but in the same year the Knights in West Bromwich were powerful enough to claim a place on the School Board.[27]

By this time the Knights were running into opposition from unions whose jurisdiction they were felt to threaten, and a further difficulty soon arose over the impossibility of registering the order under the Trade Union Acts because of its headquarters being in the U.S.A. This left its funds unprotected against embezzlement by officers and in 1890 the failure of two prosecutions to recover funds had a damaging effect on membership in the Black Country and elsewhere.[28] In an attempt to remedy this situation a conference at Smethwick in August 1890 attended by about 30 delegates, mostly from the Birmingham and Black Country area, resolved to establish a British National Assembly. After some delay a constitution was approved giving the British Knights 'the same powers of government as the General Assembly in America' and accordingly the British National Assembly of the Knights of Labour was formed with headquarters in Cradley Heath.[29]

At the Congress of the Labour Electoral Association at Westminster in May 1891 the National Assembly claimed 3,000 members but thereafter it declined rapidly. There were less than 500 members in 1892 and two years later it broke up. By this time the various local assemblies in the Black Country had all disappeared and the dissolution

in 1897 of the Smethwick and District Knights of Labour Co-operative Society, established in February 1890, removed all traces of the organisation from the area.[30]

The Flint Glass Makers. Perhaps disappointed by its experience with the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Trades Council the Flint Glass Makers' Union in Stourbridge never affiliated to the Midland Counties Federation, but its fortunes during the quarter century prior to the Great War ran broadly parallel with those of the Federation and most of its constituent societies.

The decline of the union's authority consequent on heavy and persistent unemployment among its members was brought into sharp focus by the growth of non-union labour in the Stourbridge trade. In 1896 there were about 270 non-union workers in the town,[31] and the union's weakened position was clearly revealed when it called out its members at the firm of Stevens and Williams over an offer to a glassmaker of wages of less than the standard rate. The firm quickly agreed to pay the union rate and the strike was soon over but it had two very significant features. First, 42 union members complained that they had been called out against their will and were highly critical of the central secretary for authorising the strike. Second, some of those who had been called out returned to work before a settlement was agreed and continued to work with non-union men thereafter.[32]

Union influence in Stourbridge appears to have been further undermined during the last years of the nineteenth century, until in 1902 one of the leading employers was encouraged to seek a confrontation with it. In March 1902 a dispute arose at Webb's Dennis Glassworks over the firm's decision to replace a servitor, who had left their employment, with a footmaker of their own choice, instead of the man nominated by the union. When the union called out its men the firm responded with dismissal nntices and also 'decided to throw off the shackles of the society once and for all.'[33] By recruiting non-union labour Webb's were able to re-open their factory within a fortnight and when the dispute spread to three other firms who refused to stop supplying Webb's the union was also unable to close them.

This dispute was never officially terminated. Initially about 120 men were involved, and 46 of these were still out in July 1903. It appears that the union then simply abandoned the struggle and left its members to work out their own salvation. Fifteen still remained out of employment at the end of 1904.[34] Webb's success in excluding the union demonstrated clearly how much the combined effects of depressed trade and the growth of non-union labour had undermined the union's former strong position. Over the next years its position was further weakened as the practice of limiting production per turn was progressively abandoned in most Stourbridge glasshouses

This enabled non-union men to earn more than those bound by the society's rules. In consequence more glassmakers deserted the union, and by 1911 membership in Stourbridge had fallen to only 104 workmen and servitors and 55 footmakers.[35]

The nut and bolt makers. For the craftsmen in the nut and bolt industry the period immediately following the first attempt to apply the alliance philosophy was a time of depression. In 1886 there were partial strikes against a further 5% wage reduction and in 1887 strike action at the works of Cotterell and Company was accompanied by legal proceedings for the recovery of unlawful deductions from wages.[36] In spite of this the reduction was made effective in a number of shops and when trade began to recover in the winter of 1888-9 it brought some confusion over wage rates. Some employers reverted to the 1881 list, i.e. restored the 5% cut imposed in April 1885, while others merely restored the more recent reduction. In addition the increasing use of steel in the trade had by this time rendered the 1881 scale largely obsolescent. These developments and the early successes of the Midland Trades Federation bringing hopes of improved labour organisation and discipline encouraged Richard Juggins to take the initiative which resulted in the formation of the South Staffordshire Nut and Bolt Wages Board in February 1889.[37]

The recovery of trade continued through 1889 and in consequence the new wages board was quickly able to secure universal acceptance of a revised version of the 1881 list. This was followed in October 1889 by a 5% wage advance, but during 1890 the recovery of trade began to level out and through 1892 prices in the product market fell sharply. Undercutting of wages began and with the majority of operatives working only two days per week all attempts by the wages board to prevent it proved ineffective. Early in 1893 the employers side of the wages board gave notice for a 15% wage reduction, and when the men's side agreed to accept no more than 7½% deadlock resulted. Agreement on reference to an arbitrator also proved impossible and accordingly it was decided that the constitution of the board should be revised in an attempt to improve its operation and strengthen its authority.[38]

The changes involved enlarging membership of the board, to 12 representatives for each side; improving its executive efficiency by appointing a secretary for each side, on the lines of the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board; provision for more frequent meetings to discuss special problems as they arose; and provision for more flexibility in application of the guarantee fund.[39] The revised constitution took effect towards the end of 1893 and while it does appear to have enabled the board to function more smoothly this could not disguise the fact that the situation of the nut and bolt craftsmen was

by this time such as to be beyond resolution by any reshaping of institutional arrangements for the marginal adjustment of wages. The market for hand made nuts and bolts was still shrinking rapidly in face of the continuing technical advance of machinery and with the labour force contracting more slowly this made further wage reductions inevitable.

The realities of this situation were tacitly recognised by one of the first acts of the reconstituted wages board in 1894, which was to agree to just such a reduction. The union, which still had about 1,000 members,[40] was strong enough to limit the amount of the reduction to the 7½% it had envisaged the previous year but the continuing contraction of the market for the hand made product progressively undermined its position and rendered it increasingly ineffective. By 1897 about 60 employees at the Patent Nut and Bolt Company in Smethwick already belonged to Will Thorne's Gas Workers' and General Labourers' Union and over the next years the Nut and Bolt Workers' Association lost further ground to the Gas Workers' Union. In spite of a revival of trade which brought wage increases of 5% in both 1896 and in 1900 successive recruiting drives in the Halesowen and Blackheath districts, where the craft branch of the tradd was now largely concentrated, brought little response.[41]

The union retained a sufficient legacy of its former authority to obtain a 53 hour week for craftsmen in 1902

and, through the wages board, to prevent undercutting of wages in 1904 and 1906, but with the change to machine production continually eroding its membership base by 1914 it was no longer an effective force in the industry. Membership had fallen to only about 500 and it had been superseded as the craftsmen's recognised negotiating body by the Gas Workers' and General Labourers' Union.[42]

The nailmakers. During the last decade of the nineteenth century further attempts were made to establish organisation in the nail trade but without success. Two societies were in existence in 1889. The Nailmakers' Association had a membership of between 200 and 300, with men paying a subscription of 2d per week and women 1d per week. It had no constitution and no established rules, and with a weekly income of £2/10/-d at most it was clearly a totally ineffective organisation. An association of spike nail makers also enjoyed a nominal existence at this time, but nothing further is heard of either of these societies.[43] In 1892 the Halesowen Nailmakers' Society was formed only to be dissolved two years later. Maximum membership appears to have been about 400.

This last organisation may have been involved with the Bromsgrove Amalgamated Nailmakers' Union, established in 1893, and the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Wrought Nailmasters' Association, formed in 1892, in establishing a short lived wages board for the trade during 1893.[44] The only practical outcome was what proved to be the last nailers' list. At its inception the list covered almost

5,000 workers, but by 1910 only 1,250 hand nailers were left and four years later the wrought nail trade was virtually extinct.[45]

The chainmakers. Closely associated with the nail trade, at least in the public mind, was chainmaking. The two were usually discussed together in any account of Black Country squalor and poverty and they had a number of common features. Their techniques of production were similar and both trades were bedevilled by foggers and truck through much of the nineteenth century.

There were also two vital differences. First the adverse consequences of a large outwork element for the bargaining position of the workers were mitigated in chain-making by two features of the trade, namely the organisation of production and its geographical concentration.

The organisation of production in chainmaking was such that the industry was effectively divided into two quite watertight sections. Large chain, such as ships' cable, and the best quality small chain was made only in factories by exclusively male labour, and were quite beyond the scope of the outworkers who produced all the other infinite varieties of 'common' small chain. This had beneficial consequences for both sections of the trade. It prevented wages in the factory section being undermined by the fierce and unregulated competition among workers in the outwork branch, and in turn the high earnings of the factory workers provided wages in the domestic section with an 'anchor' which was absent in nailing and other trades.

The geographical concentration of the chain trade, into an area of only three or four square miles at Cradley Heath and Old Hill, meant that individual chainmakers in the domestic section had much greater knowledge of market conditions than their fellows in the nail trade who were scattered over a much wider area; this strengthened the chainmakers' position vis-a-vis the masters and foggers and meant that they could not be so easily undersold.

The second important difference between nail and chainmaking was that the craft basis of chainmaking remained unaltered down to 1914. In the absence of machinery to displace hand labour the steady expansion of the market for chain from the middle years of the nineteenth century was reflected in the derived demand for labour so that the numbers employed in chainmaking more than doubled, to 6,550, between 1861 and 1911.[46]

The growth of demand was particularly evident in large chain consequent on the rise of world shipping, and with the wages of factory workers effectively insulated from the effects of unregulated competition among outworkers, by the end of the 1880s these were 'such as to allow the workers to live decently, and the hours of labour regular and moderate.'[47] This provided a firm platform for the establishment and growth of labour organisation in the form of the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association of Saltney, Pontypridd and Staffordshire.

The formation and success of the Chainmakers' and

Strikers' Association was due largely to the vision and energy of Thomas Sitch. Born at Lomeytown, Cradley Heath, in 1852, the son of a chainmaker, Sitch began work at the age of eight blowing bellows in a chainshop. He later became a very young chain striker at Messrs. Parkes in Tipton, and then at the age of 17 he moved with his family to Newcastle on Tyne where he worked as a small chainmaker. While living and working in Newcastle he became the youngest member of the Trades Council, and the relative strength of trade unionism in the north-east, as compared with the 'mushroom' unionism of his native Black Country made a profound and lasting impression on him. When he moved to Saltney to work on government contracts at the works of Wood and Company, finding no trade organisation there, he initiated discussions with his fellow workers on the necessity of remedying the situation. The response was sufficiently encouraging for Sitch to proceed with his idea and on 6 July 1889 the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association of Saltney, Pontypridd and Staffordshire was formed with Sitch as general secretary. The initial membership was just 15, all drawn from Wood's factory, and the union's place of meeting was the Red Lion Hotel, High Street, Saltney.

As the name indicates Sitch's union was an organisation exclusively for workers in the factory branch of the chain trade, where teams of workmen consisting of one chainmaker and two or three strikers made heavy chain.

No attempt was made to include the outworkers. Among the small chainmakers an overstocked labour market had produced conditions where union organisation seemed impossible 'among these individual workers each fighting for his own hand, and either underselling or being undersold by his neighbour and fellow toiler in the struggle for his daily work.'[48]

Thomas Sitch was fully aware of the potential danger of this situation to his own union and he was the prime mover behind the formation, again in 1889, of the National Amalgamation of Chainmakers' and Chain Strikers' Associations. This was conceived as an umbrella organisation to embrace all chainmakers' organisations in both sections of the trade with the principal purpose of raising funds by 'contributions, levies, fines, donations and interest on capital, for the purpose of mutual support.'[49]

Coincidentally with the formation of the National Amalgamation and the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association the great agricultural depression of the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the rise of mechanised transport checked the expansion of the small chain trade for a time, and consequent on its stagnation the late 1880s and early 1890s were punctuated by a series of strikes among the outworkers. These proved to be a serious drain on the resources of the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association as its funds were channelled through the National Amalgamation to support the outworkers, and

in 1893 the shortlived attempt by the Chainmakers' Association to extend direct financial support to the small chainmakers was ended. In that year the Cradley Heath and District Chainmakers' Association, an outworkers' union established in September 1892, became involved in a protracted strike for a 5/- list. About 800 workers were involved and as the strike dragged on the drain on the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association funds became more than it could bear, even with members paying 6d per week strike levy in addition to the usual subscription of 6d per week. Accordingly it was agreed between the executive of the Cradley Heath Association and that of the Chester Society, as the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association became known in south Staffordshire, that the funds of the two societies be kept separate and that they become self sufficient.[50]

Freed from the near-impossible task of seeking to maintain the outworkers the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association expanded steadily. In 1894, when Sitch returned to his native Cradley Heath to become full time secretary of the union, it had a membership of 360. Within two years this figure had grown to 850 and by 1914 membership embraced almost all the 1,300 employees in the factory branch of the chain trade, where the union in effect had a closed shop in an industry which had virtually a world monopoly of a vital product.[51]

A main factor in enabling the union to achieve this

position was its success in securing the insertion of a clause into a Fair Wages Resolution of the House of Commons requiring all employers submitting tenders for government contracts, which provided the bulk of employment in the factory branch, to pay the same rates of wages. Subsequently when submitting such tenders the owners met with their employees to decide what wages should be for the duration of the contract.[52] This practice largely eliminated price and wage competition in the large chain trade and so further strengthened the union's already strong position.

The growth of the society's strength was reflected in its finances. In 1896 total resources were £340. By 1913 the excess of income over expenditure on a single half years working, at £778, was more than double this amount. At this time it was estimated that over the 24 years of the union's existence in return for contributions totalling £45,300 members had received £21,828 in out of work benefit, £3,900 in sick pay, £1,424 in funeral allowances and more than £400,000 in increased wages. In the 20 years between 1893 and 1913 the Chester Society secured eleven wage increases raising average earnings in the trade from 18/- to 40/- per week, and without ever having to call a general strike. In all the years to 1913 strike pay totalled less than £900, of which £500 had been spent in the attempt to build a bridge to the outworkers in the early years.[53]

The industrial success of the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association enabled it to exert considerable leverage as a parliamentary pressure group, working first through the Midland Counties Federation and later through the General Federation of Trade Unions. In addition to its part in securing extended coverage of the Particulars Clause and tightening the Truck Act of 1896 the union also succeeded, after a bitter struggle, in eliminating two long standing abuses from its own section of the trade, namely the issue of bogus testing certificates and the resale of condemned chain.

Bogus certificates were those issued by unscrupulous manufacturers stating that chain had successfully undergone the tensile tests required by the Chain Cable Acts 1864-74, when in fact it had not been so tested. Much of this chain found its way abroad where its inferior quality, as well as endangering life, damaged the reputation of British chainmaking and invited competition. With the help of MPs of all parties the Chainmakers' Association secured successive amendments to the legislation, which by requiring stricter supervision of testing by the Board of Trade and imposing stiffer penalties for evasion finally eliminated the practice.[54]

The union was similarly successful in putting an end to the practice whereby condemned government chain was bought and re-sold as sound. At certain times of the year it was the custom at Admiralty dock yards to sell by auction lengths of used chain which had been condemned as

unsafe for further use. Some 'rogue' manufacturers would buy such chain at low prices, cut out the most badly worn links, re-join and blacken the whole chain and re-sell it as sound, thereby undercutting legitimate manufacturers. Together with the Employers' Association the union mounted a sustained agitation to expose and end this scandal, until by progressive tightening Admiralty instructions required that disused chain be mutilated beyond all further usefulness before being sold.[55]

Probably more important than any of this in strengthening the union's position in the industry, however, was the setting of a statutory floor beneath wages in the outwork branch of the trade. Following the end of its own attempt to support the outworkers in 1893 the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association was constantly engaged in a search for some means of eliminating the possible threat to wages in the factories posed by the largely unregulated small chain section of the trade. Consequent on the opening of new foreign markets the small chain trade recovered strongly in the first years of the twentieth century, but the same 'helpless dependence of their condition' which had been noted in 1890[56] left the wages of outworkers to be largely determined by masters and foggers and effectively excluded them from any substantial share in the renewed prosperity of their industry. Successive corrective legislation, such as the provisions of Factory Acts, had left this

central problem, the low wages of the outworkers, completely untouched. Resolution of it required the establishment of a successful union within this branch of the industry and only in 1905 was this finally achieved. In that year the Cradley Heath and District Hammered and Country Chainmakers' Association was formed and in 1907 it became the Hammered Chain Branch of the National Federation of Women Workers.[57]

The leading local figure in the organisation of the small chainmakers was Thomas Sitch's third son, Charles. He was born in Chester in 1887 but had moved to Cradley Heath at the age of seven when his father became full time secretary of the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association. He left school at 13 and for the next five years worked as an assistant in a grocer's shop. At the age of eighteen he went to Ruskin College for two years, supported by a grant from the Chainmakers' Association. The experience of Ruskin College and his family background led naturally to an active interest in trade unionism, and from the age of 20 Charles Sitch was intensely involved in trade union organisation in Cradley Heath and the surrounding districts. He became Labour MP for Kingswinford in 1918 and in 1922 he succeeded his father as secretary of the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association.

The association of the outworkers' society with a successful national organisation, the continuing expansion and profitability of the small chain trade and the support

and example of the Chester Society together ensured that the new union did not go the way of its predecessors and fade quickly into obscurity. These factors also ensured the success of the agitation mounted by the National Federation to secure inclusion of the chain outwork trade within the provisions of the Trade Boards Act of 1909, and as the smallest and most compact of the four industries in which boards were initially established by the Act chainmaking became the first trade to which minimum wage legislation had been applied in England since the repeal of the Spitalfields Act in 1824.

The Trade Boards Act came into force on 1 January 1910 and the Chain Trade Board held its first meeting on 7 January at the offices of the Rowley Regis Urban District Council in Old Hill. Under section 2(1) of the Act the board was composed of three members nominated by the Board of Trade and six from each side of the industry. The employees side consisted of three union officials, who included Thomas Sitch and the secretary of the Women Workers' Federation, and three persons working at the trade.[58]

The first Chain Trade Board held 27 meetings, the last on 4 December 1912 when it was terminated at the end of the three years of operation envisaged by the Act. Regulations establishing a new board were issued by the Board of Trade on 14 February 1913 and the first meeting of the new board was held on 2 April 1913. It held five meetings

before the end of the year, by which time in addition to establishing a minimum wage it had raised piece rates in the trade by up to 67% compared with the level of 1909. Under its protection two unions, one of men employed in outshops, covering about 70% of the eligible workers and the local branch of the Women Workers' Federation, including about 60% of eligible workers, were operating successfully;[59] and the board's influence was extending to other industries, notably hollow-ware, where the standard it had set was soon to be emulated.

The hollow-ware workers. Labour organisation in the hollow-ware trades of the Black Country dates back to the formation in 1802 of the Wolverhampton Tin-Plate Workers' Society. As already noted this society amalgamated with a similar body in Birmingham in 1876 to form the Amalgamated Tin-Plate Workers of Birmingham, Wolverhampton and District, and following a further amalgamation with societies in London in 1889 the union was again re-formed as the National Amalgamated Tin-Plate Workers of Great Britain.[60]

Union progress reflected the continued expansion of the tin-plate ware section of the hollow-ware industry through the 1870s and 1880s, but in the last decade of the nineteenth century the prosperity of the tin-plate trade was threatened by growing competion from abroad. The producers of domestic hollow-ware in particular were faced with fierce competition from Germany, where the

growth of the basic steel industry had provided a cheap material 'which could be easily manipulated under the stamp or press and which therefore laid the foundations for a German enamelled stamped steel hollow-ware trade.' As a result during the nineties imports of this type of ware 'began to pour into England and to displace the saucepans, bowls and kettles previously made of tinplate.' The new manufacture was taken up by several Black Country firms, and the labour force engaged in the production of domestic hollow-ware came increasingly to consist of semi-skilled machine operators. This development and the reluctance of the Amalgamated Tin-Plate Workers to abandon principles of strict craft union orthodoxy left workers in this branch of the tin-plate trade largely unorganised.[61]

In other branches of the tin-plate trade the change over to machine methods was much less rapid but nevertheless towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century it was beginning to pose problems for the Amalgamated Tin-Plate Workers. The increase in the number of women employed on some types of work was threatening to undermine the wage levels of craftsmen and the union amended its rules to forbid members to work with women on certain jobs traditionally done only by men. In addition the increased use of machinery gave wider scope for the division of labour or 'sectionising' —— breaking down a job into sections each done by a different

workman instead of the established craft practice whereby a fully skilled man did the whole job from start to finish. This not only offered a further threat to the wages of craftsmen, but by lowering standards of competence had produced a situation where 'there are a lot of men walking about when there are situations open which they ought to be able to take up.'[62]

Despite these developments the long tradition of organisation among craftsmen in the tin-plate section of the hollow-ware trade saw union membership hold up strongly, and in Wolverhampton, the main centre, it was still 98% of potential in 1908. The continuing strength of its organisation enabled the union to maintain uniform prices and minimum wage rates in the trade, and to control effectively conditions in the newer branches, such as gear case work.[63]

The newer, galvanised ironplate section of the hollow-ware industry remained apart from the influences affecting the tin-plate section and its expansion as a craft based industry continued unchecked to 1914, stimulated by the increasing demand for dustbins, and for water tanks for housing and general engineering purposes. The growth of this trade was accompanied by a shift of location from Birmingham to the Black Country. This began in the late 1880s and was largely complete by 1914, when most of the industry was found in and around Lye. The main cause of this migration was the nature of the

industry's product, which required a great deal of manual labour but not of a highly skilled type. With production carried on by a large number of small employers the trade was highly competitive, and since wages were by far the largest element in total cost and with high quality labour not required manufacturers were drawn from Birmingham into the Black Country where wage levels generally were considerably lower.[64]

The same factors which brought about the shift in location also had unfortunate consequences for the early development of union organisation in the industry. The first attempts at organisation in the Black Country were made in the early 1890s. In 1893 there was an ironplate trade society in Lye with 300 members and a similar organisation in Bilston with rather less than 100 members. These societies may have been branches of the General Union of Braziers and Sheetmetal Workers, but this cannot be established with certainty. This latter association had been established in 1862 as the General Union of Tin-Plate Workers by the amalgamation of a number of small tin-plate workers societies in the north of England, but in recognition of the growing importance of the ironplate trade had been re-formed and renamed in 1892.[65]

Shortly after its formation the Bilston society became involved in a protracted and eventually unsuccessful strike over the discontinuation of a bonus scheme.[66] This dispute was indicative of the growing price competition

in the ironplate section of the hollow-ware trade, and as it had done in other Black Country trades this development led employers and workmen to seek a solution through adoption of the alliance philosophy. An agreement to establish an alliance for the ironplate trade of the Black Country was concluded in June 1895. The terms of the agreement were the familiar ones that employers would engage only union labour, while all workmen would join the union and work only for those employers paying the established list prices. The alliance was quickly rendered ineffective by the refusal of employers, and particularly those in Lye, to join in sufficient numbers, and a strike over this and a claim for higher wages followed in the autumn. Some 280 men and 30 boys were involved and the dispute lasted for over two months before ending with an agreement to establish a wages board in place of the abortive alliance.[67]

The board also proved unsuccessful and it collapsed within two years of its formation, as some firms refused to pay agreed rates of wages and the union side proved unable to honour its undertaking to bring its members out on strike at these firms. Associated with the failure of the board was a fall in union membership. The Lye society had only 191 financial members in March 1897 and the Bilston society appears to have broken up altogether by this time.[68] Over the next few years 'insane competition' among a multitude of small producers continued, until by 1906 Lye had earned the unenviable reputation of

being 'a terribly bad place for the trade; it would not get a living for itself, and it won't let others get one.' Piece rates were 50% lower than they had been in 1880 and between 10% and 40% below those of 1889.[69]

The situation of the ironplate workers at this time and the manner of its eventual resolution was very similar to that of the small chainmakers in nearby Cradley Heath. The fact that employers in the ironplate trade had little difficulty in paying the higher rates required by the Fair Wages Resolution of 1891 to men engaged on fulfilling government contracts indicated that, as in chainmaking, the continuing growth of the industry was maintaining profits at a level sufficient for them to pay higher wages for other grades of work also,[70] but the weakness of organisation on the employess' side prevented effective action being taken to bring this about; and in both industries the final elimination of sweating and inclusion within the protective framework established by the 1909 Trades Board Act was brought about by emulation of the example offered by a better organised allied trade, on the inspiration and hard work of a strong personality.

The personality in this instance was Simeon Webb. He was born in Dudley in 1864 and worked as a miner until he was in his middle twenties when he went to work for Hill and Smith Limited of Tividale, near Dudley, makers of sheet and galvanised hollow-ware. He became president of what had now become the Galvanised Hollow-Ware, Sheetmetal

and Braziers Association in 1898 and general secretary of this society in 1901. His exercise of these offices brought him into close contact with officials of the National Amalgamated Tin Plate Workers' Union, and with the example of what had been achieved by efficient organisation in the tin-plate section of the hollow-ware trade constantly before him Webb set out to build an equally effective organisation among the ironplate workers of the Black Country.

This was a formidable task but union membership was assiduously built up to about 400 by the early months of 1909, when the adoption of an improved Fair Wages Resolution consequent on the findings of the Fair Wages Committee in the previous year provided the 'possibility of them making headway in the immediate future.'[71] The new Fair Wages Resolution required simply that in case of a complaint about excessively low wages being made against any employer the appropriate government department could, after establishing what 'good' employers were paying, at its discretion make a ruling that all contracts placed by the department must be carried out at similar wages and under similar conditions to those prevailing in the workshops of good employers.[72] By this time government contracts were the biggest single source of employment in the galvanised trade, so that the progressive application of the new Fair Wages Resolution gradually built a 'floor' beneath wages and progressively eliminated the vicious undercutting which had characterised its growth over the previous 20 years.

This development underpinned the foundation of organisation already laid by Simeon Webb and a considerable increase in membership of the Galvanised Hollow-ware, Sheetmetal and Braziers' Association followed. Growth was further encouraged by the events of 1912-13 until by 30 June 1913 total union membership stood at 1,379. Of these 626 were in Lye and another 189 in Quarry Bank. Members' contributions amounted to a total of £996/3/5d and the executive 'had never been able to present such a balance sheet in the history of the union,' and in September 1913 the galvanised hollow-ware trade was scheduled for inclusion in an extension to the Trade Boards Act of 1909.[73] The business of establishing the Hollow-ware Trade Board ran into a number of difficulties and its formation was further delayed by the outbreak of war but it eventually began operations in 1918.

The locksmiths. The success of trades unionism in chain-making and hollow-ware was not, however, typical of organisation in other Black Country trades during the quarter century prior to 1914. In both industries special circumstances, notably their sustained expansion and their extensive involvement with government, acted to prevent occurrence of the familiar pattern of progressive decline in labour organisation. In lockmaking this pattern was again clearly evident.

The National Amalgamated Lock and Keysmiths' Society was formed on 9 March 1889 on the first wave of impetus

given to craft organisation by the initial success of the Midland Counties Trades Federation. The secretary was Edward Day and the union's headquarters were established in Wolverhampton. It began well. By 1892 total membership had reached 1,800 and branches had been formed in Willenhall, Birmingham, Leicester, Liverpool, Bolton and London. The Willenhall branch was the biggest with over 1,000 members, large enough to justify the appointment of Joseph Martin as branch secretary. The subscription was 3d per week and strike pay was 5/- per week after three months membership, rising to 10/- per week after six months, plus 6d per week for each dependant child under the age of 13. By agreement with the Midland Counties Federation the cost of benefits was shared equally between the funds of the two associations.[74]

During its first years the union effectively resisted a number of attempts by employers to reduce wages and successfully carried through a strike in support of a claim for a wage advance. In 1890 a demand for a 10% increase was granted without opposition by most employers, but 16 or 17 of the Willenhall employers stood out against it. The locksmiths at their works were duly brought out on strike and after eight weeks they conceded the advance.[75]

The initial success of unionism could not, however, obscure the presence in the lock trade of the debilitating factors so familiar in other industries. Keen price

competition among a large number of small producers, a significant proportion of outwork and a steady increase in the number of women workers exerted constant downward pressure on wage levels until by 1892, despite the 10% advance secured two years previously, these were less than half what they had been 20 years earlier.[76] Over the next three years the combined effects of depressed trade, 'men doing work at their own homes at sweating prices' while there were vacant stands in factories and 'one employer bleeding another' brought widespread unemployment and distress to Willenhall, where about 60% of the population were dependent in some degree on the lock trade. The union had no out of work fund to support the unemployed and in consequence its membership declined sharply.[77]

At the end of the 1890s a degree of prosperity returned to the trade and with it the fortunes of the union improved somewhat. Membership appears to have recovered and the ninth Annual Report made reference to a gain of £573/3/4½d on the years working.[78] The recovery of trade was sustained long enough to encourage the union to press for a wage advance, and in September 1902 the employers were memorialised for a 10% increase. This was rejected on grounds that 'it would put trade into the hands of foreign competitors' and in mid-October, supported by the Midland Counties Federation, the union resolved to strike.[79]

The locksmiths were led in this strike by a new general secretary, William Millerchip. He was a Walsall man, born in 1863. He had followed his father into the lock trade at the age of ten, at the Walsall Locks and Cart Gear Company Limited, a successful co-partnership enterprise. He became chairman of the directors of Walsall Locks and Cart Gear at the age of only 24, and had only recently resigned this position to take up the post of union secretary. Millerchip's influence was an important factor in ensuring that the strikers' resistance was maintained until the second week of January 1903 by which time the situation had become completely deadlocked. It was accordingly agreed between the two sides that a Wages board for the trade be established and this was formed in March under the presidency of G.R. Thorne, the Mayor of Wolverhampton.[80]

The wages board soon collapsed as 'the employers refused to carry it into effect, except in a totally useless form,' and over the next years the pressure on wages was further intensified by ever increasing competition from machinery. As a result by 1908 the wages of expert locksmiths were only about 12/- per week, while those engaged on common classes of work were earning even less.[81] The imminent extinction of their trade revived interest in a wages board among both masters and men, and in March 1912 a second such board was formed. Agreement was reached almost at once on a 10% wage rise for

craftsmen, to be implemented in two stages, and this in turn stimulated some recovery in the fortunes of the National Amalgamated Lock and Keysmiths' Society. As a result in February 1913 the union was able to report that in Willenhall, which remained the centre of the trade, it had had 'a successful year both from the point of view of the increase of members and financially.'[82]

The report also revealed that in spite of this improvement in membership and finances the executive council of the union was fully aware of the implications which current developments in industrial organisation held for craft unionism. It gave notice that the council was considering a revision of the society's rules which would make it possible 'to include all metal workers and women connected with the lock trade.' The revision was eventually carried through so enabling the locksmiths' union to adapt successfully to the transformation of lockmaking from a craft based trade into a modern mass production industry. The National Union of Lock and Metal Workers today has a membership of over 8,000 and total assets of £132,000. Willenhall remains its main centre of strength, but there are also branches in Manchester, London and Edinburgh.

The hollow-ware workers' unions have also successfully adapted to modern conditions. In 1920 the National Amalgamated Tin Plate Workers of Great Britain and the Galvanised Hollow-ware, Sheetmetal and Braziers Association

were absorbed into the National Union of Sheetmetal Workers and Braziers. Through further amalgamations and progressive expansion of its scope this union has grown into the National Union of Sheetmetal Workers, Coppersmiths, Heating and Domestic Engineers. Total membership is currently about 90,000. The Wolverhampton and Bilston branch has about 2,000 members and the Lye branch about 1,000 members.

Those unions which have not responded to change have faded into obscurity or ceased to exist altogether. The affairs of the Nut and Bolt Workers' Association were wound up in 1956 when membership had dwindled to only about 30. These members were then absorbed into another small society, the Screw and Rivet Makers' Society of Smethwick, itself a survival from the 1880s. The Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association still maintains a token organisation but membership is only just over 200 and when the present secretary, A.E. Head, retires it, too, will probably be wound up.

The two unions in the flint glass trade maintained their separate existence until 1948 when they amalgamated to form the National Union of Flint Glass Workers, with membership open to all those employed in the industry, including ancillary workers. Membership today is about 1,300. Stourbridge is the largest of the seven branches, with 570 members, and a Stourbridge man, J.R. Price, has been general secretary since 1955. The union, which is

not affiliated to the T.U.C., registered under the Industrial Relations Act 1971 and the owners have agreed to an agency shop. Both Webb and Company and Stevens and Williams recently became union houses again and the practice of filling vacancies in consultation with the union has been revived.

Notes to Chapter 8 on pages 520-525

C H A P T E R N I N E

THE NEW UNIONISM: RISE TO POWER 1889-1914

Obstacles to growth. The new unions of 1889 made little initial impact in the Black Country. The basic reason for this lay in the special character of the area's industrial structure. The chronically overstocked labour market in most of the traditional trades of the area consequent on uncontrolled entry into those trades and the accelerating contraction of product markets offered employers neither incentive nor opportunity for any intensification of work. This in turn prevented the growth of a discrepancy between a static technical and organisational structure of industry and rapid expansion of output which elsewhere, by producing an accumulation of discontent and a parallel increase in the vulnerability and sensitiveness of management to workers' pressure, constituted a main element in the seed-bed of trade union explosion.[1]

In these unpropitious conditions the 'almost pathetic caution' of the new unions effectively precluded any substantial basis of organisation being established in the area. 'They hoarded their funds, appointed new officers only with extreme reluctance and absolutely refused to alter their structure.'[2] As a result of this extreme caution, despite their pretensions to national organisation most of the new unions remained largely regional bodies. Thus in 1893, out of 22,000 members of

the National Amalgamated Union of Labour, founded in 1889 as the Tyneside and National Labourers' Union, about 19,000 were still in the north-east of England. In the one new union to develop anything like a truly national organisation in these early years, the National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers, this characteristic caution was also clearly evident. The administrative unit of the Gasworkers' Union was the district. Organisers worked from a district office under the control of a district secretary, and these together with a lay delegate from each district formed the central executive committee of the union. Establishment of a new district organisation was therefore a major step involving the staffing of a new unit and an adjustment of the union's central machinery, and was only taken with great reluctance by an executive fearful of diluting its authority, and of committing funds to an expansion of uncertain viability. The Gasworkers' Union had established a district organisation in Birmingham by the end of its second year and in 1896 it had 6,024 members, but no separate Black Country district was established prior to 1914.[3]

The rise of the Midland Counties Trades Federation may also have been a factor deterring the Gasworkers' Union from attempting to extend into the Black Country. By encouraging hope of effective trade organisation better suited to the peculiar industrial character of the area than that offered by the unionism of the new

societies this served to attract potential members away from the Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union, and could well have increased its reluctance to make any thoroughgoing attempt to organise an unpromising area.

A final factor acting to check the growth of the new unions in the Black Country was their connection with socialism. To categorise these unions as socialist-led organisations of unskilled labourers, as the historian of the General and Municipal Workers' Union correctly points out, is one of history's half truths, but there was certainly an open and explicit commitment to socialism on the part of many leaders of the new unions. Will Thorne was a member of the S.D.F. almost from its foundation and together with his colleagues in the Gasworkers' Union was a prominent figure at international socialist conferences. In the National Amalgamated Union of Labour the replacement in 1892 of William Stanley as general secretary by A.T. Dipper, who was the main champion of socialism among the leadership, was indicative of the growing influence of socialist ideas in this union. Similarly, the succession of 'new unionist' resolutions at the T.U.C., especially the motion of 1890 when the old guard was routed by the decision to seek an eight-hour day by legislative as well as industrial action, strongly enhanced the 'socialistic' impression given by the new unions, and by the same token further handicapped them in an area where established

labour leaders were committed Lib-Labs almost to a man and notably reluctant to seek an eight-hour day through legislation.[4]

The only new union to establish any basis of organisation among Black Country workers during the last decade of the nineteenth century was the Birmingham Amalgamated Society of Gasworkers, Brickmakers and General Labourers (hereafter referred to as the Birmingham Gasworkers' Union to distinguish it from the National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers). This union was formed in May 1889 on the initiative of Jack Tanner, a member of the A.S.E. and the Birmingham Trades Council. Many of its early leaders were drawn from among members of the Trades Council and this was an important factor encouraging the Birmingham Gasworkers' Union to extend into the Black Country. From its foundation in 1866 the Birmingham Trades Council had always been ready to offer support to the cause of trades unionism in the Black Country and it welcomed the opportunity provided by the formation of the new union, of complementing the work of the Midland Counties Trades Federation by recruiting those workers falling outside the scope of the Federation's organisation. In addition, the pacific Lib-Labism of the leaders of the Birmingham Gasworkers' Union was fully in line with attitudes in the Black Country, and the proximity of the union's headquarters made recruitment in south Staffordshire a natural extension of its activities.[5]

The first Black Country branch of the Birmingham Gasworkers' Union appears to have been established in Dudley soon after the union's formation. It quickly ran into the familiar problem of apathy among the membership but it maintained some sort of existence and together with branches in Swan Village (West Bromwich), Walsall, Wolverhampton, Tipton and Smethwick was represented at the union's third annual meeting in April 1892. At this time the Birmingham Gasworkers had 24 branches and a total membership of about 3,500 but there is no indication of how this was divided between Birmingham and the Black Country. Cash in hand at 31 March 1892 amounted to £687. Three years later the number of branches had increased to 40 and in 1896 the membership included some spring makers in West Bromwich and a number of cycle workers in Wolverhampton. By 1901 the union had a membership of 4,000 and reserves of £3,000, and an accident fund had been established. By paying an extra ½d per week in addition to the ordinary subscription of 2d per week members laid up by injury received benefit of 10/- per week for the first 13 weeks, and 5/- per week for the next 13 weeks.[6]

By this time the National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers had begun to make its first tentative incursions into the Black Country. Recruitment does not appear to have been organised systematically but seems to have proceeded haphazardly, with the union taking

advantage of opportunities when and where these were presented. As noted above, in 1897 60 nut and bolt workers employed at the Patent Nut and Bolt Company in Smethwick belonged to it, and in the same year it also had between 200 and 300 members in Wolverhampton. In 1901 it succeeded in organising the quarrymen of Rowley 'rather strongly.' The basis of this organisation survived at least until 1909, by which time the union had recruited a further number of nut and bolt workers in the adjacent Blackheath area.[7]

Meanwhile, the Birmingham Gasworkers' Union was continuing to make headway. In March 1910 it had a branch in Willenhall, over 100 strong and still growing, and in June of the same year it began to organise the corporation vehicle workers in Wolverhampton. By this time it had also extended its activities into the south-west corner of the Black Country, and was recruiting considerable numbers of brickmakers in the fireclay district between Quarry Bank and Stourbridge.[8] The moving spirit in this area was a local man, James Cooksey Mason. He was born in Quarry Bank in 1887 and started his working life at the age of 13 as a pony driver in the clay pits. His first application to join the Birmingham Gasworkers' Union had been rejected on the ground that they did not accept unskilled workers, but he was successful on a second application. Thereafter he had quickly established himself as the unofficial leader of the brickmakers and was now building the basis of union organisation among them. He

later became a full-time official of the Birmingham Gas-workers' Union and subsequently the Birmingham district secretary of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers.

In spite of the progress made latterly by the two gasworkers' unions, at the end of the first 20 years of their existence the new unions had still established only a very tenuous foothold in the Black Country. Over the next few years, however, this picture was to be dramatically transformed as progressive displacement of the obstacles which had earlier frustrated their growth created conditions that were almost ideal for rapid expansion.

The decline of the Midland Counties Trades Federation to a rump of only a few thousand members meant that by this time it was no longer an alternative focus of organisation. Initial suspicions of the socialism of the new unions had been to some extent allayed by 20 years experience of it, and a number of Black Country unions, including the Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association and the Wednesbury Edge Toolmakers' Association, had even affiliated to the Labour Party. A further factor in helping to remove fears of socialism had been the way in which the I.L.P. had developed in the Black Country. With local leadership in the hands of moderates like Charles Gibbs, of the Operative Bakers' Union, and Harry Brockhouse in

West Bromwich, and William Sharrocks, of the Boiler-makers Society, in Wolverhampton, the threat of the I.L.P. fomenting violent revolution seemed remote indeed.

The most important factor in the rise of the general unions was, however, the marked acceleration in the speed of technological change now occurring in the Black Country and the accompanying increase in the scale of industry. The introduction of machinery to perform work formerly carried out with hand-held tools, such as planing, shaping and boring, as well as creating in ever increasing numbers a new class of machine operators, also brought with it changes in the product itself and the organisation of work. The most profitable application of the new technology lay in specialisation and long runs of a standardised product rather than the production of a great variety and wide range of articles in small batches. In turn this required larger productive units and a bigger volume of capital investment.[9]

These developments had important consequences for industrial relations. The production of standardised articles by repetitive machine processes in large productive units now offered the opportunity for intensification of work. The need to secure an adequate rate of return on a substantial capital investment provided the incentive, and by the same token, rendered management increasingly sensitive and vulnerable to workers' pressure. At the same time technical change

encouraged an accumulation of discontent among the new semi-skilled workers. Their exclusion from skilled trade organisation left them just as vulnerable to pressure on wages as workmen employed in the traditional Black Country trades, particularly as the new machine work increased the proportion of women in the labour force;[10] and progressive erosion of the formerly widespread paternalistic relationship between workmen and their employers, combined with a more rigorous application of strict commercial principles consequent on larger capital investment, meant that this vulnerability was increasingly likely to be exploited, particularly in times of bad trade. These conditions amounted almost to a prescription for industrial unrest and trade union explosion, and from 1909 events in the Black Country began to move quickly in this direction.

The triumph of militancy. The process of industrial change described in general terms above had probably gone furthest in the production of domestic hollow-ware. The decline in the production of tinplate ware which had begun in the 1890s consequent on the growth of competition from Germany was accelerated through the first decade of the twentieth century by changes in fashion and a sharp fall in the local production of 'black' plates. The output of kitchenware increasingly came to consist of lighter and less substantial articles than could be made from traditional materials, and there

was a correspondingly rapid change in productive methods. The use of stamps and pressure presses (Staffordshire fly-presses) was extended and the technique of spinning on the lathe came to be widely applied in the production of kettles, saucepans and frying pans. Much of the enamel spraying of these articles was done by machinery, and electric and acetylene welding were also commonly used.[11]

The reluctance of the Amalgamated Tin and Iron Plate Union to extend its organisation to machine workers left West Bromwich, where the production of kitchenware was largely concentrated, still a 'non-union town' in 1910;[12] and it was among the semi-skilled hollow-ware workers in West Bromwich, excluded from the protection of orthodox craft unionism, that the first manifestations of unrest were felt. By this time the Workers' Union, formed in 1898, had developed its main strength in Birmingham, where John Beard had been a full time organiser since 1904. More consciously geared for growth than any of its predecessors among the general unions, the Workers' Union was in a strong position to channel into organised and effective protest the unrest that was beginning to appear just beyond the city boundary in West Bromwich.[13]

The first small signs of unrest occurred in 1909 when there was a strike of casters employed at Kenricks, one of the leading hollow-ware manufacturers in West Bromwich. This was the first labour trouble at Kenricks

for almost 20 years and only their second experience of strike action in an existence dating back to 1791. The dispute was over a price list established at the time of the last strike in 1890, which the process of technical change had rendered obsolescent. The men stayed out for a month before returning on the firm's terms of a 10% wage reduction. No union was involved and the strike passed off almost without notice but the nature of the dispute was clearly indicative of the changes that were taking place at Kenricks and similar firms and the consequences of these changes for the conduct of industrial relations.[14]

Over the next year Black Country industry generally was free from disputes but in 1911 there were further signs of unrest among the hollow-ware workers in West Bromwich. Typical of many small strikes was that which began early in June at the works of Izon and Company, when 28 men came out over the proposed introduction of a new system of tinning which they claimed would lead to a loss of jobs and a 30% reduction in wages. Significantly only nine of the men were tinners, the rest being sympathisers from other departments. None of the men involved in the dispute belonged to a union but the Birmingham Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union came in to support them with strike pay and help in the distribution of strike leaflets.[15]

The firm responded by arranging a test of the new

system in the presence of some of the tinners. This demonstrated that by using an electrical process to deposit tin on saucepans the new method enabled seven saucepans to be tinned in the time it would take to tin four by manual application. This, however, merely served to confirm the men's suspicions of the process and the strike continued while further negotiations took place. Significantly in the light of what was to follow, Izon's now claimed that the unrest had been incited by an employee who had only recently joined the firm, but they succeeded in persuading the men to return to work for a trial period of three months. When this expired, in mid-September, the managing director of Izon's, John Chesshire, claimed that the men were earning between 12½% and 30% more than previously and agreed to have this claim tested by an independent workman recommended by the Hollow-ware Manufacturers' Association. Before the test could take place a number of tinners and turners struck again but this time over the employment by the firm of a man who was not a member of the Birmingham Gasworkers' Union, which a considerable number of Izon's employees had now joined. They quickly returned to work when the man concerned agreed to join the union, and with the dispute over the introduction of the new tinning process also being resolved satisfactorily by the end of the year the trouble at Izon's had subsided.[16]

West Bromwich was also the Black Country town most affected by the rail strike of August 1911. The first

effects of the strike were felt in the town on 18 August when some early workmen's trains did not run. On the following day all the men employed at the Great Western Railway station reported for duty as usual but after an appeal by a local official of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants they left work, and from then until the end of the strike the station was at a complete standstill. The united response to the strike call in West Bromwich prevented any occurrence of the violence which took place in neighbouring Langley. Here two trains were held up and signal boxes manned by blacklegs were attacked by strikers, and troops had to be brought in to subdue disturbances and dispel mobs.[17] In an area of traditionally pacific industrial attitudes this was strongly symptomatic of the disintegration of established relationships that was now beginning to take place.

The most significant event in a year of portents, however, occurred in Bilston, where a branch of the Workers' Union was established at the beginning of April following intensive propaganda work by Arthur Ellery, who had been recently transferred to the Birmingham office of the Workers' Union from a small society of municipal employees in Bristol. Towards the end of May the union's steward at the Etruria works, Joseph Guy, was dismissed from his job, allegedly because of his membership of the union. A number of other employees

were also ordered to leave the union, and when they refused the firm responded by locking out union members. As the locked-out workers, who included a number of women, were replaced by blacklegs there were outbreaks of violence and a number of union members were arrested as 'disorderly persons.' Fifteen who refused to pay their fines were sent to prison, but only after almost six months was the union's resistance finally broken and the attempt to organise in the Etruria works abandoned.[18] In spite of the union's failure this dispute served the wider purpose of 'educating the workers of that and the surrounding districts to the necessity of combination,' and stimulated a considerable growth in membership of the Workers' Union over the next year.[19]

The industrial scene in 1912 was dominated in the Black Country as elsewhere by the miners' minimum wage strike, but there were a number of smaller disputes mainly triggered off by the miners' stoppage and similarly centring on demands for a minimum wage. Again West Bromwich was the main centre of unrest.

The May Day demonstration in the town on the evening of Sunday 4 May called attention to the growing demand for a basic minimum wage for all workers with Joe Bailey, a leading member of the I.L.P., calling particular attention to the plight of many corporation employees whose wages were as low as 16/- per week. A demand for a 24/- per week minimum had already been shelved as unacceptable

by the West Bromwich Town Council, and at its meeting of 5 June the council, while accepting a report of the General Purposes Committee recommending substantial wage increases for its employees, again refused to implement a minimum wage.[20]

The council's latest refusal brought the minimum wage question into sharp focus and sparked off a series of similar agitations by other groups of workers. In July the painters, led by W.H. Day, another prominent figure in the West Bromwich I.L.P., began their campaign for a minimum wage. In August the journeymen bakers, whose wages averaged only £1 for a week of 80 or more hours, resolved to seek a 54 hour week and a 24/- minimum, and the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union began to organise a minimum wage campaign among the canal boatmen.[21] There were also signs of unrest in other towns; for example, in Lye the Workers' Union organised a successful agitation by women hollow-ware workers for a 10% wage increase,[22] but only in West Bromwich was there at this stage an insistent demand for a minimum wage. Many of the Sunday evening meetings of the Labour Church were devoted to the subject, and leading socialists such as W.C. Anderson, Tom Mann, Victor Grayson and Ben Tillett came to West Bromwich to support the claim. The British Socialist Party also began to organise the growing agitation for a minimum wage among the unskilled workers in the town and as unrest spread these two currents in it, socialist endorsement of a

minimum wage demand, increasingly attracted the attention of the Workers' Union.[23]

The Workers' Union had already achieved one notable success in securing a minimum wage. In October 1911 about 600 workers at the B.S.A. factories in Birmingham struck over a complicated wage grievance. They were quickly followed by between 2,000 and 3,000 less skilled workers, both men and women. Some of these belonged to the Workers' Union but the great majority were not union members. Nevertheless, John Beard stepped in to help formulate their demands and joined the officials of the craft societies involved in organising the conduct of the strike. In spite of most of the strikers not being eligible for strike pay they stayed out for more than a month, supported mainly by donations from the general public. 'Public sympathy for the semi-skilled workers was most marked ----- The general feeling was ----- that workers"ought" not to be paid such low wages.' This was an important factor in the final settlement. Though the skilled craftsmen gained little, the wages of lower-paid workers were considerably improved. Pieceworkers were guaranteed a minimum weekly rate and rates generally were adjusted to give the average worker a wage of 25% above the minimum.[24]

As with the Bilston dispute earlier in the year the publicity surrounding the B.S.A. strike stimulated a considerable increase in union membership and the attendant

growth of income made possible further strengthening of the full time organising staff in Birmingham. George Geobey, secretary of the district committee and a former B.S.A. worker, was appointed at the end of 1911. In 1912 he was joined by W.M. (Billy) Adamson, a member of the Patternmakers' Society, and Julia Varley, an organiser for a local women's trade union committee who had assisted the union in the disputes of the previous year, and who now became the first woman member of the Workers' Union staff.[25]

Encouraged by the increasing strength of its membership and organisation, and seeing in the situation developing in West Bromwich a good opportunity of repeating its recent success in Birmingham, the Workers' Union began an active recruiting drive in the town. This was conducted at two levels. On 27 September John Beard, now a Birmingham City Councillor, spoke at the first of a series of public meetings to pledge the support of the Workers' Union in the fight for a minimum wage; the enthusiasm generated at these meetings was translated into actual membership of the union at clandestine gatherings in public houses and coffee houses.[26]

At the same time the union was also beginning to infiltrate members into a number of Birmingham firms which were notorious for their opposition to trade unionism. One such firm was W. and T. Avery, makers of weighing machines. In November 1912 the secretary of

the Winson Green branch of the Workers' Union was allegedly victimised by the management of Avery's Soho factory. About 400 workers immediately walked out and the next day over 1,000 stayed away. The great majority of them were outside the union but again John Beard took charge of the situation and within a fortnight the dispute was settled. The union was recognised and the firm agreed to apply district rates and conditions, including a minimum wage of 21/- per week. Separate negotiations were put in hand on the union's claim for an additional 2/- on the minimum wage.[27]

This latest achievement of the Workers' Union encouraged the leaders of the minimum wage agitation in West Bromwich to think in terms of actively involving the union in their campaign. At the end of the year several members of the local I.L.P. met John Beard secretly in Birmingham to plan how best to take advantage of the union's growing strength in West Bromwich, but during the first months of 1913 their intentions were anticipated by events as strike action spread spontaneously from Birmingham into the Black Country.[28]

The first firm to be affected was Tangye's in Smethwick. This company was widely recognised as a good employer and was already paying a minimum wage of 21/- per week, but on 18 February 1913 some 500 employees came out on strike. Their demand for the 23/- per week minimum which was now effective at Avery's was linked

with a complaint that a number of labourers had been upgraded to machinists and semi-skilled fitters without receiving the corresponding increase in wage rates. By the end of the month 1,600 workers out of a total labour force of 2,400 were on strike. The dispute was brought to an end on 3 March when the strikers ballotted to accept the terms negotiated on their behalf by John Beard, namely a minimum wage of 23/- per week for all adult male labourers and restoration of the customary differential for machine operators.[29]

Events now began to move quickly in West Bromwich itself. Following the adoption of the 23/- minimum at Tangye's, workers at Chance Brothers, makers of heavy glass, put in a similar claim. Significantly the Chance works was, and remains, situated in Spon Lane, one of the main roads linking West Bromwich with Smethwick. The Chance workers' demand was conceded without a stoppage and another Spon Lane firm, Messrs. Griggs Limited, also granted the 23/- minimum after a short strike.[30]

Early in April a dispute began at the firm of United Hinges, a subsidiary of Kenricks. Following the installation of a cold rolling mill at United Hinges the 18 men affected requested payment of a regular 21/- per week instead of 26/- per week when working night shift and 16/- per week when on day shift. Their spokesman was Jack Jones, a young man of 25 and 'self-appointed unpaid organiser and delegate' for the Workers' Union, who had

only recently joined the firm. Whether he joined United Hinges in pursuit of the union's policy of infiltrating non-union firms is not known, but it seems likely that he did. When their request was refused Jones and the other men decided instead to press for the 23/- per week minimum and also to involve officials of the Workers' Union in the dispute. The firm refused to recognise the union and on 7 April a strike was called. This quickly spread to Kenrick's main factory which was completely closed for over a week, until on 19 April the firm conceded in full the union's demand of 23/- for a 53 hour week for men, with appropriate adjustments to some piece work rates and extra pay for overtime and night work, and a 12/- per week minimum for adult women employees.[31]

A strike at the Stour Valley works of Guest, Keen and Nettleford, which occurred simultaneously with that at Kenricks, also ended with establishment of the union's minimum rates of 23/- and 12/- per week and similar successes were achieved at a number of smaller works in the Spon Lane area of West Bromwich.[32] By this time the 23/- minimum had also been conceded by at least ten of the largest firms in Birmingham, including the B.S.A. and the giant Metropolitan Carriage and Wagon Company at Saltley, 'in the majority of cases' as the result of 'friendly negotiation.' On the Birmingham side of the Black Country men were now 'joining the Workers' Union in hundreds' and by the end of the third week in April most

of the principal firms in West Bromwich and Smethwick had come into line with the leading Birmingham employers, so raising the average wage of some 10,000 workers by 2/- per week.[33]

One firm, however, contined to resist union pressure. This was the Birmingham Carriage Company, and on Friday 25 April men on the night shift at its Smethwick works walked out. By Monday almost half the 2,000 workers at the plant were involved, and the factory was closed. The immediate cause of dispute with this firm remains obscure. The company claimed that it was already operating the 23/- per week minimum and the main demand put forward by the union was for a general increase of 2/- per week. Negotiations quickly became deadlocked and at this point the Black Country strike entered a new and profoundly bitter phase.[34]

Up to this time unrest had been largely confined to the towns adjacent to Birmingham and strikes had been largely of an opportunist character with the Workers' Union stepping in to take advantage of the situation within particular firms and pressing home its claim for the 23/- and 12/- minimum rates. Now the strike movement spread rapidly to other parts of the Black Country. As it did so the resistance of employers noticeably stiffened and on the men's side first moves were made to co-ordinate and actively promote strike action.

The first town to be affected by the spread of strike

action was Wolverhampton. During the previous year the Workers' Union had been involved in a dispute at Pinson and Evans Limited,[35] but over the first months of 1913 the town had been quiet. Now the success of the minimum wage campaign in Birmingham, West Bromwich and Smethwick saw the Wolverhampton Trades Council, led by James Whittaker, the Labour Party agent for Wolverhampton West, and Harry Bagley, later to become a Workers' Union organiser, mount its own agitation. The Workers' Union at once offered support and at the end of April women members of the union employed in the bolt department at Bayliss, Jones and Bayliss came out on strike. The dispute quickly spread to other departments and the initial demand for a general wage increase crystallised into the familiar claim for a minimum wage of 23/- per week for men and 12/- for women. After a fortnight the strikers accepted the firm's offer of a 21/- minimum and work was resumed. The union, however, refused to recognise this settlement and continued to press its claim for the 23/- minimum. Other firms became involved and within a few days most of Wolverhampton's industrial east side was engaged in disputes.[36]

From the east end of Wolverhampton unrest spread to Wednesbury, and in the second week of May 200 labourers at the John Russell tube works struck in support of a claim for a 10% increase for all pieceworkers and for those day workers earning less than 25/- per week. Few

of the strikers were organised but the Workers' Union stepped in to take charge of the situation, and the men were persuaded to modify their claim and bring it into line with the union's demand. In accordance with the leadership's new strategy of actively spreading the strike movement the Wednesbury men marched to Russell's Alma works in Walsall to bring out the workers there. There were probably even fewer union members among the Walsall tube workers than there were among those in Wednesbury, but the Walsall men were persuaded to join the strike. Thereafter strikes spread rapidly among both skilled and unskilled workers in Walsall, Wednesbury and adjacent towns until at the end of the third week in May it was estimated that nearly 10,000 men and women had stopped work.[37]

Members of the two gasworkers' unions were also now involved in the strike movement and to co-ordinate activities John Beard formed a Minimum Wage Council with headquarters at Wednesbury. This consisted of officers of the three general unions directly involved in disputes, and at the end of May it published a consolidated statement of demands in the form of a strike leaflet headed 'The Bottom Dog's Struggle for Betterment.' To the basic demand for minimum rates for adults was added a claim for a 10% increase in prices paid to pieceworkers, a 2/- per week advance for all those earning more than 23/- and a scale of minimum payments for youths and girls,

graduated according to age. In addition the leaflet proclaimed that 'the time has come for a united demand to be made to the employers' and efforts to spread the strike were further intensified.[38]

These efforts were directed first at the Birmingham Carriage Company. It was now over a month since trouble had first broken out at their Smethwick works and there was still no sign of a settlement being achieved. It was accordingly decided to extend the dispute to the firm's factories at Wednesbury and Oldbury, and on 28 May the Smethwick strikers marched to Oldbury and then to Wednesbury to bring out the company's employees in these towns. Two days later John Beard called out 200 members of the Workers' Union from the firm's main factory at Saltley, Birmingham, where the 23/- per week minimum wage had been operative for some weeks, claiming that work was being diverted from the company's Black Country factories to Saltley. Birmingham Carriage retaliated by locking out the whole of its 7,500 workers, so that within a week the number of workers made idle by the dispute almost doubled.[39]

Up to this point the strike movement had been largely confined to the north-east sector of the Black Country but signs of unrest now began to appear in the small towns and industrial villages west of Dudley. The rivet makers of Blackheath were the first to strike, and they were followed almost at once by the clay miners of

Lye and the Gornal brickmakers. The brickmakers' strike, over a claim for a 10% wage increase, soon involved more than 1,000 men and women, with the Birmingham Gasworkers' Union organising the men and the National Federation of Women Workers organising the women. These smaller disputes were, however, quickly swallowed up in a further surge of the main strike movement which carried it across the Black Country and brought out another 5,000 men from the tube works of Stewart and Lloyd at Coombs Wood, between Blackheath and Halesowen, and raised the number of men made idle to an estimated 30,000 on the last day of May.[40]

Not all of these were involved in disputes over the 23/- per week minimum wage. Some were higher paid workers striking to show solidarity with the lower paid, or in pursuit of claims of their own, and a growing number had been made involuntarily idle by the stoppages. This last development aroused considerable resentment on the part of other unions, particularly the A.S.E., whose members were increasingly becoming involved in disputes not of their making and from which they stood to gain little or nothing.[41] At the same time the speed at which the strike was spreading and the numbers involved placed a massive strain on the administrative resources of the various unions. In face of these last two consequences the official leadership tried to discourage any further spread of the strike movement but this had now developed

a momentum of its own. Attempts to check it met with little success and through the early days of June the number of workers affected continued to grow.[42]

By this time the organisation of relief for the strikers was becoming a major problem. Because they had joined unions so recently the great majority of strikers were ineligible for strike benefit and had to rely on funds provided by public contributions. A national appeal launched on 1 June brought a substantial response, but as the numbers out of work continued to increase the amount raised was barely sufficient to maintain the level of relief previously provided by local efforts. This was 1/- per week for single persons and 2/- to married men, with an additional 1/- per week for those with children. Soup kitchens were opened to cater for strikers' children and Co-ops and local tradesmen distributed gifts of food, but these were pitifully inadequate and in early June it was reported that strikers were starving to death.[43]

Privation, however, merely served to harden the resolution of the strikers and the situation deteriorated into sporadic violence. When the Talbot Stead works in Walsall attempted to re-open with blackleg labour a crowd of over 3,000 strikers stormed the factory gates and were only repulsed by mounted police, and there were similar incidents in other towns.[44]

The employers' reaction to these developments was to

form the Midland Employers' Federation. Most of the firms involved in the dispute were 'non-federated,' i.e. outside the Engineering Employers' Federation, established at the time of the A.S.E. lockout in 1897-8, because they were in trades not generally accepted as engineering. The new body was set up with the specific purpose of co-ordinating and strengthening the resistance of Birmingham and Black Country employers in what had now become a critical situation.[45]

The first action of the new Federation was to declare that it would not negotiate while strike action continued but under pressure from civic leaders and the Engineering Employers' Federation, some of whose members were now affected, in mid-June the Midland Employers' Federation agreed to meet representatives of the unions. To avoid granting direct recognition to the unions the discussions were nominally with the Allied Trades Federation, to which the unions involved in the strike belonged. The outcome of the talks was an offer by the employers to implement a minimum wage of 23/- per week in the Birmingham district (which was defined to include Smethwick and Oldbury) — where it had already been conceded by nearly all the important firms acting individually — and a minimum of 21/- in the Black Country. This was unanimously rejected by the union leaders and their decision was endorsed by the strikers who ballotted by almost 50:1 to refuse the offer.[46]

To emphasise their continuing solidarity and determination the strike committee despatched deputations of strikers on hunger marches to appeal for funds in other industrial centres, and it was simultaneously announced that failing an early settlement 10,000 of the higher paid workers in the metal trades would join the strike. In face of this threat a number of individual firms conceded the 23/- minimum, but the main body of employers within the Midland Employers' Federation held firm and a few tried to re-open their works. This in turn provoked further outbreaks of violence. At the Etruria works in Bilston, the scene of the protracted Workers' Union dispute two years earlier, a crowd of strikers attacked the factory and engaged 150 policemen in a pitched battle.[47] Similar incidents occurred in other towns and with the position deteriorating daily, at the beginning of July the Board of Trade intervened.

The Labour Department of the Board had, of course, kept in close touch with the situation throughout but had refrained from taking action while there seemed any possibility of an autonomous settlement. With this now seeming increasingly unlikely Sir George Askwith, the Chief Industrial Commissioner, arrived in Birmingham on 2 July to bring the two sides together and negotiations began on the same day. This time the strikers were represented directly, by the Minimum Wage Council, led by John Beard. As the negotiations opened it was

reported that only one firm of any size in Birmingham was not applying the 23/- per week minimum, and over the next two days a number of major Black Country employers announced their willingness to do so.[48] This concession progressively undermined the opposition of the remaining Black Country firms, and their resistance was further weakened as press and public opinion increasingly swung behind the strikers. Typical of much editorial comment was that of the Wolverhampton Express and Star.

'Employers know well what their men are worth and what they can afford to pay them, and ought not to wait on a strike before putting that knowledge into execution.'[49]

These developments resulted in the Midland Employers' Federation adopting a more conciliatory attitude and a draft agreement was reached with the Minimum Wage Council on 7 July. On the central issue of the minimum wage it was agreed that the 23/- minimum for men should be applied universally and immediately in the Birmingham district, again defined to include Smethwick and Oldbury. For the Black Country it was agreed that a minimum of 22/- per week should be implemented at once, rising to 23/- per week after six months. There was also agreement on the immediate application of the 12/- per week minimum for women in both Birmingham and the Black Country.[50]

In addition to establishing minimum rates for adults the agreement laid down a schedule of wages for youths and girls. It also included a number of provisions for

avoiding disputes and outlined the procedures to be followed in the event of there being any breach of the agreement.[51] These were of a basic and elementary kind, but they represent a first conscious attempt at 'job regulation' for the great mass of Black Country metal workers.

Job regulation involves unions extending their function 'beyond the securing of material gains to the establishment of rights in industry.' In turn this requires union participation 'in the regulation of labour markets and of labour management because such regulation defines their rights, and consequently their status and security, and so liberates them from dependence on chance and the arbitrary will of others.'[52] Such regulation had never been attempted, or even conceived, by the Midland Counties Trades Federation, and its failure to appreciate the importance of seeking to 'penetrate into management' can be seen as another aspect of the fatal inflexibility of the Federation and an important contributory factor in its rapid decline.

> As labour history demonstrates again and again, wages and hours movements have no more than temporary appeal and their momentum may be spent as much by success as it is by failure. Permanent organisation could not be built on this foundation. To secure a permanent membership trade unions have to render a constant service to their members. This is made possible by their participation in job regulation, and the deeper and more extensive that participation the greater the service they can offer.'[53]

At a time when the technological and managerial structure of industry was changing as rapidly as it was in some of the Black Country metal trades during the decade prior to 1914 the willingness of unions to seek and apply the principle of job regulation was of fundamental importance. In concentrating too narrowly on wages and hours movements and standing aside from the attempts to 'regulate the exercise of managerial authority in deploying, organising and disciplining the labour force after it has been hired,'[54] the Midland Counties Federation failed to develop beyond 'an immature level of bargaining relationships' and consequently left a vacuum in the system of collective bargaining for the work force in the Black Country metal trades which the new unions were now beginning to fill.

The need to broaden and deepen the functions of trade unions in the industries of the Black Country was demonstrated by the initial reaction to the draft agreement. This contained no provision for implementation of the general advance of 2/- per week or the 10% increase on piece rates set out in the strike leaflet issued by the Minimum Wage Council in May. In consequence there were angry demonstrations against its proposals. At a meeting in Walsall even the moderate Joe Thickett, president of the Trades and Labour Representation Council and a leading figure in the N.U.R., urged strikers 'to smash the cursed agreement,' and there were threats of

personal violence against those strike leaders advocating its acceptance.[55] This was understandable. One important effect of the draft agreement would be to narrow or in some cases eliminate differentials in earnings, and in an area where a long established tradition of wide variations in the earnings of craftsmen had been translated into considerable differences in labourers' wages between firms, or even between different departments in the same firm, this was an unprecedented step.

Strike leaders countered the angry reaction to the agreement by arguing that the issue of the 23/- minimum had been central throughout the dispute, and that the case for pieceworkers and the semi-skilled could be better negotiated directly with individual firms. These arguments eventually prevailed and on 11 Uuly 1913 the strikers ballotted by 4,944 votes to 1,236 to accept the terms of the agreement.[56] The small number voting perhaps indicates that by this time the strike had largely exhausted its momentum and that the settlement was timely.

This 'most remarkable strike,' as Arthur Ellery justifiably described it, had three important direct consequences.[57] First, it secured the application of a minimum wage across a wide range of industry. Second, it brought the first moves towards job regulation in these industries, and in so doing enhanced the status and dignity of those employed in them. Third, and

perhaps most important, the achievement of substantial wage increases for the most poorly paid workers by the support or even sacrifice of the higher paid created a basis of solidarity among workers in an area hitherto characterised by the fierce individualism of its economic life.

One index of this last development was the growth of union membership. In 1910 total membership of the Workers' Union in the Black Country was probably less than 250. By 1914, with the stimulus to membership given by the events of the previous year still working through, the union had well over 1,000 members in each of the towns of Dudley, Walsall, Wednesbury, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton.[58]

Membership of the other general unions also increased rapidly through 1913 and 1914. The Birmingham Gasworkers' Union and the National Federation of Women Workers found the towns and villages west of Dudley a particularly fruitful recruiting ground, and the growth of union organisation had especially beneficial consequences in this area, where many workers were excluded from the terms of the strike settlement. This applied only to the larger scale metal using industries and did not cover such occupations as galvanised hollow-ware manufacture, brick-making and fireclay mining, which were concentrated almost exclusively in the south-west sector of the Black Country.

In these industries the small scale of production and wide variations in conditions, hours and earnings posed difficult problems for the application of minimum standards.[59] This could not be guaranteed by a once and for all agreement but required constant monitoring by those familiar with the industries' special circumstances. Hitherto the weakness of organisation on the employees' side had ruled out such control, but with this difficulty now overcome it became possible to move towards effective regulation through the formation of wages and conciliation boards.

The first such board to be formed was for the fire-brick industry, its first meeting being held in Stourbridge on 2 December 1913. There were 14 representatives for each side of the industry, with the chairman being chosen from the employers' side and the vice-chairman from among the employees' representatives. Charles Sitch was elected the first vice-chairman, and James Mason the first operatives' secretary. Early difficulties over the extent of the board's jurisdiction were satisfactorily resolved and it then laid down a standard working week of 40½ hours, a 10/- minimum wage and a rate of 3d per hour where the full number of hours were not worked. This successful beginning brought into membership a number of firms who had initially rejected the board, and as the first year of its operation drew to a close it covered most of the industry and was functioning to the general satisfaction of both sides.[60]

By this time arrangements were already in hand to establish similar boards for fire-clay mining, and the hollow-ware trade, while the Chain Trade Board established by the Trades Boards Act of 1909 was already in its fifth year of operation. This involvement in structured negotiations on terms of equality with employers was a long way removed from the 'helpless dependence' of the previous general of workers in these industries, and a major step towards the eventual achievement of decent wages and conditions.

Notes on Chapter Nine on pages 526-529

PART FOUR

C H A P T E R T E N

POLITICAL ORGANISATION AND ATTITUDES: THE LIBERAL FAITH INTACT 1863-1883

By the early 1860s the Black Country was established as a stronghold of the evolving Liberal Party. At the general elections of 1857 and 1859 the three Black Country borough constituencies — Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton — had all returned Liberal members, either unopposed or by convincing majorities, and the commitment to Liberalism was just as strong in those parts of the area which were included within the county divisions of Staffordshire South and Worcestershire East.

The extent to which the strength of Liberalism in the Black Country was rooted in the working class vote cannot be precisely established; no pollbooks have survived. It does, however, seem probable that even more than elsewhere, in the Black Country the votes of working men formed the rock on which the Liberal majority in the boroughs was based. At first sight the evidence for this view seems unpromising. In all three Black Country boroughs the proportion of electors coming within 'the description of mechanics, artisans and other persons supporting themselves by daily manual labour' was lower than in the rest of the country. For England as a whole in 1866 this figure was 26.2%. For Wolverhampton it was

only slightly lower, at 25.5%, but in Dudley it was 18.2% and in Walsall only 16.8%.[1] Figures such as these hardly seem to justify the claim that Liberal strength in the Black Country owed more to working class votes than it did in other areas.

However, while the proportion of working class voters was lower in the Black Country than elsewhere there are good reasons to suppose that among these voters commitment to the Liberal cause was both more widespread and more enduring than that of similar voters elsewhere. Given that the economy of the Black Country was based predominantly on the iron industry and its user trades, and the almost universal organisation of ironworks and workshops on a sub-contract basis it follows that a very large proportion of working class voters, who were exclusively £10 occupiers,[2] would be sub-contractors in the metal trades. This in turn had important implications for their political affiliation.

If the distinctive appeal of Gladstonian Liberalism for the working class lay in its ability to bring to them 'a sense of their own audacity and shrewdness, a feeling of participation in a wider national life, the excitement of partisanship in a demonstrably superior cause, and the prospect of gradual improvements in living conditions and in the justice of social arrangements,' this would surely evoke a much stronger response in the Black Country than in 'the county towns and market towns

and cathedral towns' of England in the 1860s.[3] To puddlers and iron rollers and all the other denominations of subcontractor, living largely by 'their own audacity and shrewdness' in a turbulent frontier society, the prospect of improvement in their material condition and the offer of some involvement in the amelioration of social arrangements would seem likely to have a much more powerful appeal than to shoemakers, building craftsmen, printers and others employed in 'the immemorial crafts of old Europe,' who formed the backbone of working class Liberalism in more socially developed areas.[4]

Factors further strengthening Liberalism in the Black Country were the ordinary chapel-goers conception of the Liberal Party as the 'natural political instrument for those who wish to promote the interests and establish the principles that Primitive Methodists have at heart,' and its association with the temperance movement.[5] Both Primitive Methodism and the cause of temperance had many adherents among the skilled workingmen of the Black Country; and where working class commitment to Liberalism deriving from acceptance of its political and economic principles was buttressed by these two elements, as most notably in the case of William Aucott, the effect was to create a particularly strong and enduring Liberal faith.

The strength of Liberalism in the Black Country was confirmed at the general election of 1865. The sitting

Liberal members were returned unopposed in both county divisions, and in Walsall. In Dudley H.B. Sheridan, the Liberal member since 1857, was confirmed in office by a vote of almost 2:1 over his Conservative opponent; and in Wolverhampton, a two member constituency, the single Conservative candidate polled a derisory 47 votes, 1,472 fewer than the second Liberal.[6]

In this last contest respectful working class thanks to the senior Liberal member, the Right Honourable C.P. Villiers, 'for his great exertions in the cause of Free Trade' were coupled with hopes that

> although his time had been too occupied before in matters appertaining to that particular department with which he was connected he would in future turn his attention more particularly to this important question, the franchise, and endeavour to secure for the working men those privileges which are at present so unjustly held from them.[7]

As an 'advanced Liberal' having a long standing commitment to the cause of parliamentary reform Villiers was readily able to respond to such exhortations, and in the new Russell ministry he sided with Gladstone, Gibson and the Duke of Argyll in trying to secure 'a timetable for a genuine settlement.'[8] Gladstone's Bill, envisaging a £7 rental franchise in the boroughs and £14 in the counties, was duly published in March 1866 and the improvement of Parliament once more became the focus of public debate.

In the Black Country the initial reaction to Gladstone's proposals demonstrated the positive commitment

of the working class to Liberalism. On 29 March a meeting of Wolverhampton working men was held at the Beehive Dining Rooms, Garrick Street, 'to determine upon the course to be taken by the artisans of Wolverhampton in reference to the Government measure of Reform.' William Parkes, a clerk at the Merridale works of Loveridge and Company, presided and about 40 representatives from various works in the town were present. Also present by invitation were two of Wolverhampton's leading middle class Liberals, S.S. Mander and Alfred Hinde. Mander expressed his surprise and gratification 'at the business like and orderly manner in which the proceedings have been carried on,' and his belief that 'had the most virulent enemies of the Reform Bill been present their objection would have been overruled and they would have felt how safe it would be for such men ----- to have a part in the return of your representatives to Parliament.' In turn Edward Davis, a tinplate worker, expressed the support of working men 'for the men at the head of the present government' as 'the real promoters of reform.' A committee was formed to organise support for the Bill, and as a first step arrangements were made to hold a public meeting in St. George's Hall on 6 April.[9]

The meeting was attended by about 2,000 working men, 'assisted by several of the leaders of the Liberal Party in Wolverhampton,' and the town's junior MP, T.M. Weguelin. The main business involved consideration of a motion

proposed by a Mr. Markland, a workman employed at the Old Hall Works, that

> this meeting desires, most emphatically, to repudiate the oft-repeated assertion that the working classes generally are indifferent to a reform in the Commons House of Parliament, and hereby declares its unalterable determination never to rest satisfied until a comprehensive measure of Reform be carried.

The motion was seconded by Henry Fowler, chairman of the Wolverhampton Liberal Association and a former mayor of the town, who declared that enactment of the government's Bill would

> bring within the pale of the Constitution a large number of those who represented our national industry, and by so doing would enrich it with an element of strength which would add to the development of that progress and prosperity which alone could secure to England her proud pre-eminence among the nations of the earth.

The motion was supported by other leading Liberals and carried by acclamation. A second motion expressing confidence in C.P. Villiers, proposed by Weguelin, was carried unanimously, and the proceedings closed with the declamation of a petition calling on the House of Commons 'to pass the Bill for the extension of the Franchise in its integrity,' which it was proposed to circulate among the working men of the town. Within a week the petitioners had obtained more than 5,000 signatures.[10]

Over the next weeks there were similar enthusiastic demonstrations of working class support for the government's proposals in other Black Country towns, and at

the end of May a Liberal Working Men's Association was formed in Wolverhampton 'to support liberal measures coming before Parliament; to secure the return of worthy and competent representatives and to promote purity of election.' Some middle class Liberals, on the other hand, were by this time beginning to have doubts about the wisdom of a £7 franchise and there were fears in some quarters that it 'would operate injuriously in a large and important manufacturing town like Wolverhampton' by giving the vote to 'the idle and improvident.'[11]

The possibility of an open split between middle class and working class Liberals over the desirable extent of working class enfranchisement was temporarily averted by common concern at the fall of the Russell ministry at the end of June but the prospect was soon revived, and in a more acute form, by subsequent events. The 'sudden quickening among the Reform movements in the country,' consequent on the Liberal government's defeat was particularly apparent in the Reform League.[12] The League had not penetrated into the Black Country prior to the defeat of the Russell government but following the 'immense success' of the great demonstration at Brookfields, Birmingham on 27 August its organisation quickly spread into south Staffordshire.[13] A branch of the Reform League was formed in Wednesbury only three days after the Brookfields demonstration and by the end of September was going on 'in a very encouraging manner,'

having recruited 'upwards of 200 members.' By this time the Wolverhampton Working Men's Liberal Association was actively considering whether to affiliate to the League, and despite strong opposition from Henry Fowler eventually voted to do so by about 2:1.[14] Other branches were formed in Walsall, Great Bridge, Brierley Hill and Willenhall in the late months of 1866 and by the turn of the year the Reform League was firmly established as the vehicle of working class reform agitation in the Black Country.[15]

This did not bring to the Black Country any of the tensions which can be detected within the national reform movement in the early months of 1867, either between the League as the repository of the idea of creating from an extended electorate an independent working class movement and the Reform Union with its more limited aim of simply destroying the reactionary element in the Liberal Party, or between the League and a militant trade unionism of the George Potter type.[16] The Reform Union never developed into an organisation of any importance in the Black Country. The reactionary forces in the Liberal Party against which its agitation was primarily directed were simply not represented in any strength in south Staffordshire. Similarly any possible points of conflict between the League and militant trade unionism were avoided by the absence in the Black Country of any body comparable in attitude and status with the London Working Men's Association. The Wolverhampton Trades Council was

the only broadly based body of working men in the area and as yet it was neither fully representative nor authoritative, while trades unionism generally was at a low ebb in what were depression years for the iron and coal trades. These factors, together with the influence of John Bright in nearby Birmingham, preserved in the Black Country working class agitation, at this stage, a high degree of uniformity, both of aim and substantive form.[17]

The announcement of Disraeli's reform proposals in February 1867 served to reinforce this, but it also re-emphasised that common opposition to a Conservative government was not a sufficient condition for reconciliation of the differences between middle class and working class attitudes to reform which had begun to emerge in course of the public debate on Gladstone's Bill six months earlier, and which had now been made explicit by the widespread adoption in the Black Country of the Reform League's proposals for manhood suffrage. Meetings of the Reform League in Walsall, Wednesbury and Wolverhampton condemned the existing system of parliamentary representation, rejected the new government's reform proposals as 'vague and unsatisfactory' and expressed the conviction that only the Liberal Party could be relied on to secure a comprehensive measure of reform.[18] However, the translation of negative sentiment into positive proposals revealed irreconcilable differences between the League's

conception of 'comprehensive reform' and that of the local Liberal Associations. In Wolverhampton reluctant acceptance of the principle of a £7 rental franchise by the committee of the Liberal Party failed to elicit any reciprocal conciliatory gesture from the Wolverhampton branch of the Reform League, which remained firmly committed to manhood suffrage and the ballot as the basis of any reform.[19] The League's refusal to scale down its demands was now beginning to prove a serious embarrassment to the Liberal leadership in other Black Country towns, but once again the possibility of differences between working class and middle class Liberals developing into a major conflict were averted, this time by the appearance of divisions about immediate objectives among the local branches of the League.

The two strongest branches, Wolverhampton and Wednesbury, came into conflict over the suggestion that C.P. Villiers be canvassed to vacate Wolverhampton in favour of the South Staffordshire division, where the equivocation of W.O. Foley on the reform question was a source of considerable disquiet. In West Bromwich the League increasingly turned its attention to seeking separate representation for the town, so prejudicing Wednesbury's claim, and at the same time astonishingly expressed its 'satisfaction at the extension of the franchise contemplated by the Bill now before Parliament.' The Brierley Hill League's main concern was to secure

the elimination from the Bill of the clause requiring personal payment of rates as a franchise qualification, while in Smethwick the League chose to concentrate its main attack on the unjust distinction between the county and borough franchises.[20] With its energies thus diffused the Reform League agitation in the Black Country ran its course without the working class mounting any sustained challenge to the position of middle class Liberalism on the basic question of manhood suffrage, while in Parliament Disraeli's Bill went through its bewildering metamorphosis and in August emerged as the law of the land.

The Franchise Act of 1867 reduced the qualifying leasehold or copyhold franchise in the counties from £10 to £5 annual value and introduced an occupancy franchise in respect of premises of £12 rateable value, thus increasing the county electorate from about 540,000 to 790,000. The changes in the borough franchise were more far-reaching. These involved the introduction of a household franchise conditional only on the personal payment of rates, and a lodger franchise in respect of lodgings of £10 annual value. The latter was of little importance outside London but the introduction of a household franchise, and especially the provision for 'compounding,' or permitting the registration as voters of householders who paid rates through their landlords as an addition to rent, had startling effects. It more

than doubled the number of voters in the boroughs generally, and in doing so placed working men in a clear majority of the borough electorate.[21]

The impact of the Act in the Black Country boroughs was even more dramatic than in the country at large. Thus, in Wolverhampton the number of electors increased from 4,830 in 1866 to 15,772 in 1868, or from 3.3% to 9.7% of total population. In Dudley the increase was from 3.0% to 14.4% of total population, and in Walsall from 3.4% to 12.3% of total population.[22] It is impossible to establish precisely what proportion of the post-1867 electorate was working class, but if the number of compounders is taken as giving a rough guide, and this figure is probably too low, it would be about 68% in Dudley and 58% in Wolverhampton.[23]

The overall effect of these changes in the electorate was to consolidate the already strong position of the Liberal Party in the Black Country, by broadening the base of its bed rock working class support. The ending of the arbitrary distinction which gave a vote to an iron puddler or a sub-contractor in a hollow-ware works or a provident pikeman who happened to live in a £10 house, and withheld it from one who did not, enfranchised most of the 'superior working class' in the Black Country boroughs and in so doing strengthened Liberalism to the point where it was beyond the reach of any challenge from the Conservative Party.

This was clearly demonstrated at the general election of 1868. The only Black Country borough contested was Wednesbury, newly created by the 1868 Redistribution Act, and events here confirmed that the dissensions between working class and middle class Liberals during the course of the reform agitation of 1866-7 had not gone beyond a purely superficial level, and that the working men newly enfranchised by the 1867 Act were just as strongly committed to Liberalism as those who had voted in earlier elections.

The announcement of the election in June saw two Liberals quickly in the field — Alexander Brogden, the Bridgend coal and ironmaster, formerly a candidate at Great Yarmouth and sometime member of the Birmingham Council of the Anti-Corn Law League, and William Robinson, a Wednesbury ironmaster. Both were Gladstonian Liberals, committed to further electoral reform, disestablishment of the Church in Ireland, the protection of trade union funds and a reduction of defence expenditure, and both attracted early support from both working class and middle class electors. Accordingly, on 7 July a meeting of West Bromwich Liberals was held to appoint a selection committee 'to confer with similar committees in other parts of the borough with a view to securing the return of a Liberal representative,' and it was here that working class voters, for the only time in the election, played other than a purely acquiescent role in the

counsels of the Liberal Party. On the objection of the working men present, that the proposed committee was unduly weighted in favour of masters and clergymen, the meeting was adjourned until 29 July when it was agreed that a committee of 42 members, one for each 1,000 of population, be chosen with places apportioned as follows: 13 employers, 10 working men, 11 tradesmen and 8 members chosen at large. In the following two weeks similar committees were chosen in Wednesbury and Tipton, each with 27 members, and in Darlaston, with 15 members.[24]

By the time the selection committee met at the end of August the two original candidates had been joined by two more, namely Malcolm Kerr, a Commissioner of the Central Criminal Court in London, and Dr. Edward Kenealy, a barrister who was later to achieve a certain notoriety as counsel for the Tichborne claimant and as MP for Stoke upon Trent. The two latecomers were eliminated on the committee's first ballot, with Kerr getting only 12 out of 103 votes and Kenealy NIL. On a second ballot Brogden obtained 68 votes to Robinson's 35 and was accordingly adopted as the official Liberal candidate.[25]

His Tory opponent was the young son of the chairman of the Patent Shaft and Axletree Company, T.E. Walker, and with Kenealy refusing to accept the decision of the Liberal selection committee and continuing in the field as an unofficial candidate the contest became a three cornered one, though Kenealy's presence was little more than an irritant to the two leading contestants.

Widespread working class support for Brogden was never really in doubt. Once misgivings about allegations of 'tommying' at his Bridgend works had been satisfactorily resolved, and accusations that he had sent coal into south Staffordshire at the time of the miners' strike in 1864 had been disproved, the endorsement of George Potter for the support already extended to Brogden by local working class leaders like James Capper and William Aucott ensured his victory by the handsome majority of 2,350 votes over Walker. Kenealy received only 969 votes, less than one-tenth of the poll.[26]

The returns for the Black Country townships included within the county divisions of East and West Staffordshire indicate a similar strong Liberal vote in these areas, with continuing working class dissatisfaction over the distinction between the county and borough franchise and the more positive attitude of Liberal candidates on labour questions, together with the appeal of Irish disestablishment for nonconformists, being sufficient to ensure that this vote included the bulk of working class electors.[27]

The alliance between the Gladstonian Liberal Party and the enlarged working class electorate in the Black Country was further strengthened over the next few years by the upsurge in union organisation and the benefits associated with it consequent on the great boom in the coal, iron and metal using trades. The coincidence of a

Liberal government with wage advances of almost 40% and establishment of an eight hour day for the miners, the formation of a wages board and wage increases of more than 4/- per ton in the finished iron trade and similar substantial wage improvements in most of the metal using trades, pushed into the background that government's failure to repeal the Criminal Law Amendment Act or to assimilate the county and borough franchises.

In these circumstances such incursions as the Labour Representation League made into the Black Country produced only a negative response. Following its Birmingham conference in December 1872 a move by the League to nominate John Kane as a parliamentary candidate in Wednesbury foundered on what was to become a familiar weakness of Lib-Lab candidacies — the inability to differentiate sufficiently from Gladstonian Liberals in matters of general policy. While welcoming the idea of direct Labour representation in principle Wednesbury trade unionists, even the ironworkers, were 'not of one mind as to (Kane's) candidature' and in 1874 Brogden was given a clear field against a Conservative opponent. Similarly, a tentative enquiry by the League to Walsall Trades Council about the possibility of running a working class candidate in the borough came to nothing.[28]

Likewise, other circumstances which gave rise to parliamentary candidacies by working men elsewhere, such as the patronage of middle class Radicalism or the

stimulus of general legislation failed to elicit any response in the Black Country. Thus, Walsall Trades Council declined an offer by W.H. Duignan, a local solicitor and well known Radical, to contribute £100 towards the election expenses of any working man adopted as a parliamentary candidate for the borough, and a further £25 per year to help maintain him if elected.[29] Again, any impetus given by the provisions of the Mines Regulation Bill of 1872 to the miners' attempts 'to broaden the franchise and secure direct representation in the House of Commons' was checked in south Staffordshire by a growing belief in the efficacy of purely industrial strength consequent on the advances in wages and reduction in hours recently secured, by a preoccupation with purely local grievances such as the attempt by the owners to introduce special rules in the mines, and by the social structure of the Black Country. This was such that the miners did not form a separate isolate community precluded from voting by the provisions of the county franchise.[30] Black Country miners were integrated with their fellow working men and largely within the borough franchise. For them the ballot was more important than any immediate attempt to secure a further extension of the franchise, and after 1872 this was an accomplished fact.

Thus, their former positive attachment to Liberalism remained strong among the working men of the Black Country in the early 1870s. Together with the notable absence in

the area of the basic conditions for the rise of an independent political labour movement — great and successful strikes and the spread of union organisation to the unskilled[31] — this provided the basis for the Liberal sweep of the Black Country boroughs in the general election of February 1874.

In the country at large the central issue of this election for working men was the question of the labour laws and in spite of the reluctance of Black Countrymen to recognise the importance of general legislation as a factor in determining working conditions, this was inevitably reflected in the local contests. The fiercest of these was in Dudley where H.B. Sheridan was opposed by Lord Dudley's principal agent, Frederick Smith-Shenstone, backed by all the influence of the castle. With the Dudley Miners' Association at the peak of its strength and influence its lead was crucial to the working class vote as a whole, and this was given immediately and emphatically in favour of Sheridan. Smith-Shenstone's claim to be 'the colliers' friend' was openly ridiculed by Levi Brittain who recalled that it was Smith-Shenstone 'who had put his foot on the necks of the colliers' at the time of the 1864 strike. Smith-Shenstone countered with an attack on Brittain as one of 'the subtle and selfish advisers of the working classes,' and the election campaign quickly deteriorated into open violence.[32]

Attempts to coerce and intimidate working class

voters and Smith-Shenstone's refusal to commit himself to repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, together with Alexander Macdonald's endorsement of Sheridan's vigorous campaign for amendment of the Master and Servant Acts and repeal of the punitive labour laws, were enough to swing the bulk of the remaining working class vote behind that of the miners and Sheridan was returned by 5,149 votes to 4,181. On the election being declared null and void because of the accompanying violence Sheridan was opposed in May by Noah Hingley, a local iron-master. His somewhat less abrasive personality may have drawn some working class votes away from Sheridan but there was never any real doubt, as Levi Brittain said, that 'the working men who had returned Mr. Sheridan honourably on previous occasions would come forward on the present occasion and honourably return him again,' and he was duly elected with a slightly reduced majority of 718 votes.[33]

In Wolverhampton a similarly favourable position on the labour laws adopted by Villiers and Weguelin, together with a certain amount of working class anti-Catholicism generated by Catholic support for the Conservative candidate Captain Walter Williams because of his endorsement of the 25th clause of the 1870 Education Act, allowing the school fees of children attending Church schools to be paid by the Boards of Guardians, guaranteed the Liberals a massive majority.

Villiers and Weguelin each polled more than 10,000 votes, compared with only 3,628 for Williams. This last factor, working class anti-Catholicism, together with Nonconformist support for non-sectarian education, proved decisive in Wednesbury where it compensated for the inroads made into Brogden's vote by widespread defections among the sizeable Irish community who found his opposition to denominational education and Irish Home Rule unacceptable. In Walsall Sir Charles Forster's well known views on the need to amend the labour laws and his opposition to the 25th clause of the Education Act guaranteed his victory over Major W.M. Bell by a vote of almost 2:1, so giving Liberal successes in all four Black Country boroughs.[34] Over the country as a whole the Conservatives swept back into office but in south Staffordshire the secure foundation of its alliance with the working class provided the basis for another Liberal electoral triumph.

Over the next years the nature of the relationship between Black Country working men and the Liberal Party developed in complexity. The sharp decline in the membership and influence of trade unions consequent on the onset of depression forced workers to come to terms with the employers and so strengthened the industrial aspect of Lib-Labism. The Birmingham Agreement in the coal industry, the sliding scale of the South Staffordshire Mill and Forge Wages Board and the appointment of an independent arbitrator in the nut and bolt trade were all examples of

the institutional expression of this development. Its political concomitant was the endorsement of Gladstone's policies on matters of national importance such as the Eastern Question and continuing public expression of support for local MPs, particularly with reference to their role in securing amendment of the labour laws. This was accompanied, however, by small signs of dissatisfaction with the Liberal Party, especially over its failure to commit itself fully to deal with the industrial grievances of the working class, and its refusal to recognise the claims of working men to a place in the counsels of the party.[35]

The feeling that middle class Liberals 'did not sufficiently represent the working classes and did not understand their difficulties,' promoted one of the first attempts to secure independent labour representation on a local government body in the Black Country. This occurred in 1877 when Tom Griffiths, the West Bromwich miners' agent, stood as a working man's candidate for the West Bromwich School Board in opposition to the 'official' Liberal panel.[36] In the event, however, this move only served to demonstrate the confusion of working class attitudes towards direct labour representation and so weakened the possibility of any real break with Liberalism.

The opposition to Griffiths's candidacy among the working class he sought to represent was widespread and influential. Thomas Piggott maintained that in forcing a contest for places on the board Griffiths was 'an enemy

to the working man' because of the expense he was unnecessarily throwing on the parish. William Aucott felt that Griffiths was being disloyal to the Liberal Association, of which he was a member. Other opinions ranged from the view that Griffiths's move was a Tory inspired attempt 'to foment all kinds of divisions between us as working men and the Liberal Party ----- in order to get their candidates elected,' to the suggestion that in the event of his election his membership of the board might conflict with his duties to the West Bromwich Miners' Association. In spite of the support of W.J. Davis, who was himself a member of the Birmingham School Board, in face of such opposition Griffiths's candidacy was doomed to failure and he finished last of 13 candidates for 11 seats.[37]

This attempt to secure direct working class representation on local governing bodies was not repeated for some years. The deep depression which settled on the Black Country in the late 1870s weakened trade unionism further and the energies of its leadership were fully absorbed in merely preserving the fabric of organisation. Moreover, the severity of the depression seemed to confirm what many were ready to believe, that industrial organisation and political action alike were futile in face of the inexorable working of economic laws. Working class political initiative was further inhibited by the establishment in 1877 of the National Liberal Federation

designed to cover the country with democratically organised Liberal Associations under Radical leadership. Based in Birmingham and dominated by Joseph Chamberlain, the influence of the Federation quickly spread into the Black Country. The Liberal Clubs established in Darlaston in August 1878 and in Smethwick in February 1879 were the first of many in south Staffordshire and east Worcestershire.[38] In apparently opening the way for the working class voter to play a fuller part in the activities of the Liberal Party the formation of the National Liberal Federation acted as a powerful restraint on any possible attempt by labour to by-pass the party in seeking political representation.

In spite of this development and the fact that national trade union policy was now largely in the hands of Howell, Broadhurst, Burnett and Burt, all of them staunch Liberals, the suspicions of Liberalism which had arisen in previous years lingered on amongst some working men in the Black Country, and Levi Brittain for one was openly sceptical about the sincerity of the Liberal Party's intentions towards the working class.[39] This, however, remained essentially a minority attitude, and the general election of 1880 revealed that for most Black Country working men belief in Gladstone and the Liberal Party remained a fundamental article of their political creed.

Thus, James Capper speaking in support of Henry

Fowler, who had succeeded T.M. Weguelin as the second Liberal candidate in Wolverhampton, after extolling the past achievements of the Liberal Party could confidently appeal to 'the ironworkers and workmen of Wolverhampton to be true to their political principles and faithful in the discharge of their political duties,' without any 'misgivings as to the result.'[40] This confidence in the continuing commitment of working men to the Liberal Party proved to be amply justified. Villiers headed the poll with 12,197 votes and Fowler, with 11,606, polled 5,732 votes more than the Tory, Alfred Hickman, owner of the local Spring Vale ironworks. In the other Black Country boroughs there were Liberal majorities of 6,705 and 2,785 in Wednesbury and Dudley respectively, while in Walsall Sir Charles Forster was returned unopposed.

At this election the existing strong attachment of working class voters in the Black Country to the Liberal Party was strengthened by a number of factors working against the Conservative Party. The most important of these was undoubtedly the comparison of industrial prosperity achieved under the previous Liberal government with the depression of quite exceptional severity which the area was now experiencing. 'Workingmen found that Lord Beaconsfield had done no good for them and they were now turning round on him to wish him "Goodbye!"'[41] Working class dissatisfaction with the Conservative Party was further strengthened by dislike of the meddling imperial

and foreign policy of the government and identification of Gladstone, their hero, with opposition to it. Together with the improvement of Liberal organisation in the area consequent on establishment of the National Liberal Federation these factors produced what was to prove the high point of the Liberal faith among the working men of the Black Country.

The return of a Liberal government at the 1880 election affected the political position of labour generally in three main ways. First, it convinced the leadership that there was little prospect of the labour group in the House of Commons becoming large enough to hold a balance of power. Second, it confirmed that there was little likelihood of any substantial number of independent working men being returned to Parliament unless MPs were paid and election expenses placed on the rates, and both of these depended on an unlikely Liberal initiative. Third, it held out hope that the Radicals, led by Chamberlain and Dilke would, in the not far distant future, be in a position to pass important measures of social reform. The effect of these developments in the country at large was to draw labour closer to Liberalism and considerably strengthen the Lib-Lab alliance.[42]

In the Black Country where the alliance was already securely established, the increased strength of Liberalism and its turn to radicalism showed itself in

various ways. First, it gave a fresh impetus to the attempt to obtain ameliorative legislation from a well disposed government. Thus, following the formation of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Trades Council in August 1882, its first move was to seek legislation to restrict the employment of female labour in iron works and forges.[43] Second, the move towards collectivism implicit in the new radicalism of the Liberal Party had the effect of purging from its ranks those conservatives such as Levi Brittain, who regarded the possible departure from established laisser-faire Liberalism as a betrayal of its true principles.[44] Finally, it brought some hope that working class representation on local bodies, and eventually in Parliament, might be achieved by and through the agency of the Liberal Party. Moves in this direction were already being made in Birmingham in the early 1880s. There, as a result of 'Liberal concessions,' by September 1883 there were three working men on the Town Council, two on the School Board, one on the Board of Guardians and 16 on various hospital committees.[45]

This hope, however, was extinguished in the aftermath of the turmoil which engulfed British politics in the mid 1880s. The upheaval consequent on Gladstone's momentous conversion to the cause of Home Rule brought marked changes in political life in the country at large. Nowhere were these changes more far-reaching than in the

Black Country, where as a result mainly of the unwavering allegiance of working class voters to Liberalism, no Conservative MP had been returned since 1852. At the successive general elections of 1885 and 1886 the established pattern of more than 30 years was broken and the long enduring Liberal faith of Black Country working men was breached.

Notes to Chapter Ten on pages 530-532

C H A P T E R E L E V E N

POLITICAL ORGANISATION AND ATTITUDES:

THE LIBERAL FAITH BREACHED 1884-1899

From the mid 1880s the strength of Liberalism in the Black Country was progressively undermined as its basis of working class support was eroded by the complementary effects of two major changes in the structure of national politics, namely the enlargement of the electorate by the Franchise Act of 1884 and the Liberal Party's adoption of Home Rule for Ireland as official policy.

The Franchise Act

> was typically nineteenth century in form in that it was framed as an addendum to existing legislation and there was little attempt at codification. The franchise was still not based simply on residence, it was far from universal, and a host of franchise and related registration eccentricities remained.

As a result of these eccentricities by 1911 there were still fewer than 8,000,000 voters on the register in the United Kingdom, representing 17.5% of the total population, 29.7% of total adult population and 63.3% of total adult male population.[1]

The concomitant of the Franchise Act, the Redistribution Act of 1885, was less obviously 'born of compromise.' Its basic principle was to secure a more equitable relationship between population and representation by increasing the number of single member

constituencies, and this was largely achieved. Of the 637 territorial constituencies established by the Act all except 23 two member boroughs were single member divisions.

In the Black Country the Redistribution Act established seven single member boroughs. The former two member constituency of Wolverhampton was replaced by three single member constituencies —— Wolverhampton East, Wolverhampton West and Wolverhampton South. The last of these two was, in fact, completely outside the municipality of Wolverhampton and was made up of a number of small townships, of which Bilston and Sedgley were the largest. Dudley, Walsall and Wednesbury remained as borough constituencies, but in each case with substantial modifications to these boundaries; and a new borough constituency of West Bromwich was created, its boundaries being largely co-terminus with those of the borough whose name it carried.

In addition, two new county divisions, Worcestershire North and the Kingswinford division of Staffordshire, were also largely Black Country constituencies. Apart from Kingswinford, which contained an agricultural section and a residential suburb of Wolverhampton including all that town's freehold voters, there was little social differentiation between the nine constituencies, except that Wolverhampton West 'which had sprung up only in recent years by the extension of villadom,'

contained a larger middle class element than the others.[2]

The social uniformity of the Black Country was reflected in the size of the electorate in these constituencies. As a percentage of total population in 1910 this ranged only from 18.6% in Wednesbury to 17% in Walsall, among the boroughs. In the two county divisions the figure was necessarily higher, at 26.9% in Kingswinford and 23.4% in North Worcestershire. The figures for the boroughs are comparable with the national average of 17.5% and represent only a modest advance on the figures of 1868, which were 12.3% and 14.4% in Walsall and Dudley respectively.[3]

In strictly numerical terms the impact of the Franchise Act of 1884 in the Black Country was clearly much less dramatic than that of the 1867 Act, but it had far reaching implications for political change. The effect of the 1867 Act was to consolidate an existing situation. In admitting to the franchise an increased number of working men similar in outlook and attitude to those already having the vote it immensely strengthened the already strong position of the Liberal Party in the Black Country, which was grounded in the working class vote. The much more limited extension of the franchise brought about by the 1884 Act had the opposite effect. It acted to weaken the Liberal Party by bringing within the franchise working men of a different type, having no positive allegiance to Liberalism.

of the working class to Liberalism. On 29 March a meeting of Wolverhampton working men was held at the Beehive Dining Rooms, Garrick Street, 'to determine upon the course to be taken by the artisans of Wolverhampton in reference to the Government measure of Reform.' William Parkes, a clerk at the Merridale works of Loveridge and Company, presided and about 40 representatives from various works in the town were present. Also present by invitation were two of Wolverhampton's leading middle class Liberals, S.S. Mander and Alfred Hinde. Mander expressed his surprise and gratification 'at the business like and orderly manner in which the proceedings have been carried on,' and his belief that 'had the most virulent enemies of the Reform Bill been present their objection would have been overruled and they would have felt how safe it would be for such men ----- to have a part in the return of your representatives to Parliament.' In turn Edward Davis, a tinplate worker, expressed the support of working men 'for the men at the head of the present government' as 'the real promoters of reform.' A committee was formed to organise support for the Bill, and as a first step arrangements were made to hold a public meeting in St. George's Hall on 6 April.[9]

The meeting was attended by about 2,000 working men, 'assisted by several of the leaders of the Liberal Party in Wolverhampton,' and the town's junior MP, T.M. Weguelin. The main business involved consideration of a motion

The working men voting for the first time in 1885 were not skilled subcontractors of the superior working class as were the new voters of 1868. They would be underhands and general labourers, men who were hired and not men who hired others. They would have little sense of 'their own audacity and shrewdness,' which was an essential distinguishing mark of Liberal working men, but would be more given to habits of deference, more easily swayed by considerations of narrow self-interest and what the Quarterly Review called the 'traditional emotions ----- of the ruder class of minds.'[4] These characteristics rendered the newly enfranchised working men susceptible to the appeal of the post-1867 Conservative Party, based on nationalism, pride in Britain's imperial role and a sense of community,[5] and the 'dilution' of the working class electorate by the inclusion within the franchise of these 'ruder minds' meant that after 1884 the alliance between the Liberal Party and the working class electors of the Black Country could never be as strong again.

The beginnings of the decline in Liberal strength in the Black Country consequent on the dilution of the working class electorate became apparent at the first general election following the passage of the Franchise Act, the election of November 1885. Working class leaders, of course, remained faithful to their traditional Liberal principles. As on so many previous occasions their attitude was clearly defined by James Capper,

Supported by Richard Juggins and William Aucott at a rally of working men for the Honourable Philip Stanhope, who had succeeded Alexander Brogden as the Liberal candidate in Wednesbury, Capper emphatically declared that

> notwithstanding the opposition of publicans and others Mr. Stanhope would be returned with a greater majority than for a quarter of a century. Then they might hope to see the dawn of better, brighter and happier times, and the time arrive when men should be properly employed, their garners full and no complaining in the streets.

At a similar meeting a fortnight later Richard Juggins called on the working men of Wednesbury 'to record their unqualified approval of the policy of Mr. Gladstone and to express their appreciation of the Radical candidate Mr. Stanhope, and to pledge themselves to use all lawful efforts to secure his triumphant return at the head of the poll.' In Walsall Benjamin Dean made a number of appearances on Liberal platforms, and in West Bromwich G.H. Rowlinson, who was soon to leave the Black Country to become agent to the Forest of Dean miners, took an active part in the campaign of J.H. Blades, the new borough's first Liberal candidate.[6]

In the main working men rallied strongly to the call of their leaders to support the traditional cause and in six of the nine Black Country divisions there were substantial Liberal majorities, ranging from 817 in West Bromwich to 3,617 in Worcestershire North. The three constituencies to return Conservative members were Kingswinford, Wednesbury and Wolverhampton West. The

decisive Conservative victory in Kingswinford is accountable simply in terms of its atypical social structure, and the Conservative successes in the two borough constituencies were also due in part to special features of their social composition. In Wednesbury there was a sizeable Irish vote, estimated at over 500, and this was thrown solidly behind the Tory, Wilson Lloyd, on the advice of T.P. O'Connor, president of the Irish National League of Great Britain, who warned them 'not to trust any Liberal promises and reminded them that the Conservatives ended coercion in Ireland and passed the Land Purchase Bill.' In Wolverhampton West a main factor in Alfred Hickman's victory by 153 votes over Sir William Plowden was the strength of Lord Salisbury's 'Villa Toryism' in the middle class suburban areas of Merridale, Graiseley Hill and Compton.[7] In both constituencies, however, it is significant, especially in the light of subsequent events, that the Conservative candidates mounted their main challenge to the Liberals on the question of free trade, and their vigorous exposition of 'Fair Trade' as a remedy for the depression of local industry seems to have excited the 'traditional emotions' among at least some of the new voters.[8]

The election results in the country at large give the Irish Nationalists 86 seats in the new House of Commons, and with Gladstone taking up the cause of Home Rule soon after forming his ministry the Irish question

became the dominant issue in British politics. Gladstone's conversion split his own party and both his senior lieutenants, the Marquess of Hartington and Joseph Chamberlain, refused to support the measure he brought before the Commons. In the vital division 93 Liberal MPs voted with the Conservatives against the Home Rule Bill and the general election of July 1886 was fought directly on the question of Irish Home Rule.

The Liberal-Labour MPs, to a man, stood by Gladstone, but it was an uneasy loyalty deriving entirely from political expediency; there was little enthusiasm for Home Rule. In 1881 Burt had specifically stated that the Irish question was not a labour question and between 1881 and 1885, to the dismay of their radical friends, Burt, Broadhurst and Howell had all supported the Liberal administration's coercive legislation for Ireland.[9]

Reaction among labour leaders in the Black Country was broadly similar. They remained loyal to Gladstone but apart from James Capper, who 'had the greatest sympathy with Ireland,'[10] they had grave doubts about the wisdom of his policy and their former forthright and enthusiastic endorsement of Gladstonian candidates was conspicuously absent from the election campaign of 1886. The misgivings of local leaders were shared by ordinary working men, many of whom openly expressed their doubts about the sincerity of Gladstone's sudden

change of mind and speculated pessimistically about the harmful effects Home Rule could have if, for example, an Irish parliament imposed tariffs on English exports.[11]

Uneasiness about the implications of Home Rule among their followers was reflected in a welter of attitudes among local MPs. The main burden of explaining and defending government policy fell on Henry Fowler who was Financial Secretary to the Treasury in Gladstone's administration. His misgivings were revealed by the care which he took to emphasise 'the principle rather than its details' and 'he frankly owned that there were points in the Bill to which he took exception.'[12] J.H. Blades, the member of West Bromwich shared Fowler's reservations and he carried them to the point of declining to accept the party's nomination, and was replaced by J.T. Moore. Two other Liberal MPs, C.P. Villiers in Wolverhampton South and Benjamin Hingley in Worcestershire North, went even further and while expressing their support for the general principles of the party and the Home Rule Bill and endorsing Gladstonian candidates in neighbouring constituencies, themselves stood as Liberal Unionists.[13]

By contrast, in Dudley H.B. Sheridan, who was of Irish extraction, enthusiastically endorsed Gladstone's policy and armed with a personal letter of support from T.P. O'Connor he carried the fight to his opponent. In Wednesbury the certain knowledge that the Irish community

would vote Liberal with the same solidarity that they had voted Conservative in 1885 enabled Philip Stanhope to play down the Home Rule issue and his contest with Wilson Lloyd was again fought largely on the free trade question.[14]

The full extent of the damage which Home Rule had caused to the long standing alliance between the Gladstonian Liberal Party and the working men of the Black Country was revealed by the outcome of the election, which left only four out of nine seats in Liberal hands. In Wolverhampton South and Worcestershire North the former Liberals were returned unopposed as Liberal Unionists, and there was no challenge to the Conservative member in Kingswinford. Sir Charles Forster was returned unopposed as a Gladstonian Liberal in Walsall and Henry Fowler held Wolverhampton East for Gladstone. The Liberals won back Wednesbury and Wolverhampton West but these gains were offset by decisive Conservative victories in Dudley and West Bromwich.

Analysis of this confused pattern of results reveals that despite the fact that they won three of the five contested seats there was a further sharp movement away from the Liberalism among Black Country electors. In the two constituencies which they regained from the Conservatives the Liberal victories were the result of special circumstances and not of any revival in the

Liberal faith. In Wednesbury, where Philip Stanhope's vote increased by 450 while Wilson Lloyd's fell by 407, the turn round was due to a wholesale shift in the Irish vote. In Wolverhampton West the margin of the Conservative victory in 1885 had been so narrow that a swing of less than 1% in the vote returned the seat to Liberal hands, and this can be accounted for by purely accidental factors or the transfer of a small Irish vote.[15]

By contrast, in the two constituencies which the Conservatives won from the Liberals there was a massive swing away from Liberalism. In Dudley the Liberal share of the vote fell from 55.0% in 1885 to only 41.2% and Brooke Robinson ousted H.B. Sheridan by 1,930 votes. In West Bromwich the Liberals polled 897 fewer votes than in 1885 and their share of the vote fell from 55.7% to 45.8%. Significantly in both divisions the Liberal candidates committed themselves fully and quite explicitly to Gladstone's position on Ireland. In Wolverhampton East, as we have seen, despite being a member of Gladstone's government Henry Fowler carefully avoided such a commitment, but even here 'there were considerable abstentions' over Home Rule and there was a fall of almost 200 in the Liberal vote.[16]

It is, of course, impossible to apportion the abstainers and converts to Conservatism between working class and middle class electors but it seems likely that the great majority would be working men. Among the first

generation of working class voters who had hitherto customarily voted Liberal because of the prospect it offered 'of gradual improvements in living conditions and in the justice of social arrangements,' the party's decision to divert its energies away from social reform in favour of pursuing the chimera of Irish Home Rule would certainly arouse strong antipathy, particularly in a socially undeveloped area of strongly insular working class attitudes. Equally, among the new electors the Unionist cry would arouse a strong positive response from the traditional emotions and strengthen further the predisposition to Conservatism.

Thus, together the enlargement of the electorate by the Franchise Act of 1884 and the Liberal Party's decision to give pride of place to Irish Home Rule as a policy objective destroyed the Liberals' former domination in the Black Country. The extension of the franchise diluted the working class electorate in which the strength of Liberalism was rooted by granting the vote to working men whose social attitudes inclined them to the Conservative Party. The decision to pursue Home Rule for Ireland consolidated the Conservatism of these new voters, and at the same time alienated many working class Liberal supporters by relegating the party's traditional concern with social reform to a secondary position in its order of priorities. With the Irish question remaining a central issue of British politics over the next three

decades, and with the Conservative Party's appeal to the self-interest and traditional emotions of working men following from its role as the defender of Imperial Unity being enhanced by its adoption of such causes as tariff reform, there was little scope for any lasting revival of the Liberal faith in the Black Country.

The upheaval of the mid 1880s also had important implications for working class attitudes within the wider contest of national politics. As well as postponing into a very distant future the possibility of the Liberal Party dealing with social problems it also destroyed any hope of the early organisation of a separate radical party, or of radical domination of the Liberal Party. In so doing it stimulated renewed interest in the question of a labour party as the tactics of the Parnellites revived the old idea of a group of working class members, now potentially much enlarged by the enfranchisement of a large section of the working class under the terms of the 1884 Act, holding a balance of power in the House of Commons.[17]

This was revealed at the twentieth conference of the TUC in September 1887, where the advocates of open co-operation with the Liberals, such as Benjamin Pickard and Charles Fenwick were challenged on two sides. On one side T.R. Threlfall and John Wilson led a group who stressed the need for a distinct labour party, separate from the two great parties though linked in some undefined way with

the Liberals. On the other Keir Hardie vigorously attacked those labour representatives who associated with the Liberals and called for the establishment of 'a democratic party —— a party which should embrace men of every line of thought. There should be a programme and every candidate for Parliament should know that unless he could support it he must look elsewhere for a seat.'[18]

There was little response to Hardie's incipient socialism in the Black Country where, despite recent developments there was still a strong attachment to Liberalism among trade union leaders and working men generally had little sympathy with collectivist ideas.

Justice and Commonweal achieved a limited circulation and both the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League made periodic incursions into the area, but there were few converts.[19] The only socialist organisation to enjoy more than a transitory existence was the Walsall Socialist Club, founded in 1887 on the iniative of Joseph Deakin, a young railway clerk and Haydn Sanders, the owner of a small lockmaking business and a leading figure in the Knights of Labour in the Walsall district. A combination of Sanders' flair for public speaking and Deakin's 'incredible energy' in organising meetings secured Sanders' election to Walsall Town Council in 1888, but this proved to be an isolated success. Sanders mistakenly applied his considerable powers of oratory to

disrupting council business, and his indiscriminate attacks on the 'bald-headed, pot-bellied' members of the council only alienated moderate opinion.[20]

Misgivings about socialism were translated into outright alarm by the 'Walsall anarchists' plot' of 1892. Bomb patterns and anarchist literature were found at the Socialist Club premises in Goodall Street, and Joseph Deakin and four other club members were tried and found guilty on charges under the Explosives Act 1883, and sentenced to terms of inprisonment ranging from five to ten years. Deakin and his colleagues were almost certainly framed by a police spy but the affair gave socialism in Walsall and the surrounding area an 'anarchist complexion' which dogged it for many years.[21]

The idea put forward by Threlfall and Wilson, of establishing a separate labour group which would be distinct but not apart from the Liberal Party, achieved rather greater success in the Black Country. The vehicle for this idea was the Labour Electoral Association. This was an extension of the Labour Electoral Committee which had been formed by the TUC in 1886, again on Threlfall's initiative. Its prime aim was to create a network of local election committees affiliated to itself which would work with trade organisations to promote labour candidacies.[22] The Birmingham district committee was among the first to be established, and with Richard Juggins taking a characteristically energetic part in its

activities its influence was strong enough to secure the election of the earliest working class representatives to local government bodies in the Black Country.

Fittingly the first of these was Juggins himself. He was elected to the Darlaston School Board in 1889 and to the Walsall Board of Guardians two years later, retaining both positions until his death in 1895. The nature of Juggins's relationship with the Liberal Party during the last years of his life is revealing. The unquestioning commitment of former years was replaced by a much more circumspect attitude, compounded of disillusionment with the party's social policies, doubts about the sincerity of its intentions towards working men and misgivings over Home Rule. Thus, during the course of an earlier attempt to win a seat on the Darlaston School Board, in 1886, he had specifically stated: 'I do not pledge myself to either political party but to support the best measures that I believe to be most conducive to the welfare of that class in whose interest I offer myself as a candidate.'[23] Nevertheless, despite this disavowal of party attachment the difficulty of offering distinctive alternative policies to those propounded by the Liberals, and the practical politics of his situation as a lone labour member on the two local boards ensured that whenever decisions were taken on party lines he invariably identified with the Liberal group.

Juggins's doubts about the intentions of the Liberal

Party towards working men were based, at least in part, on bitter personal experience. His election successes were achieved against the background of a rising chorus of local calls for direct labour representation in Parliament, and together with the rise of the Midland Counties Trades Federation this encouraged hopes of a working class parliamentary candidate in one of the Black Country divisions.

A possible opportunity to secure a labour nomination arose in Dudley in 1891, when the withdrawal of T.C. Clarke left the Liberals without a prospective candidate. Circumstances in Dudley seemed favourable for a labour candidacy. John Taylor and other leading trade unionists were members of the Liberal Association, which seemed well disposed towards working class aspirations. More than half the electorate were working men, and more than 2,000 of them belonged to the Midland Counties Trades Federation.[24] Juggins accordingly informed the executive of the Federation that the Labour Electoral Association would 'offer every assistance' if they 'made a move' to secure the nomination of a labour candidate, and at its May meeting the council duly resolved that Juggins himself 'be recommended to the electors of Dudley as the labour candidate and that the various societies of this federation be asked to their willingness to raise the necessary funds for the election and support of Mr. Juggins.'[25]

This decision provoked a strong negative reaction from the Dudley Liberal Council, but encouraged by the belief of Philip Stanhope, the Liberal member for the adjacent Wednesbury division, that there was a 'good prospect of Mr. Juggins's candidacy in Dudley,' 'where he understood the Liberal Association had 'recently been reconstituted on popular lines,' the executive council brought the matter before the fifth annual conference of the Federation in June.[26]

Here it was moved by James Smith, of the small chainmakers, 'that the conference agrees to the principle of direct labour representation and approves of Mr. Juggins being selected as a labour candidate for the representation of the Parliamentary borough of Dudley.' The motion was opposed on grounds that Juggins's nomination as a parliamentary candidate would compel his resignation as secretary to the Trades Federation and that they had insufficient funds for such a venture, but it was carried by 19 votes to 13.[27]

However, doubts about the viability of Juggins's candidacy within the Federation were quickly reinforced from outside. The Wolverhampton Express and Star immediately warned against the venture and in some quarters the Federation's move was interpreted as 'gross impertinence.' The Dudley Liberal Council also firmly re-asserted that it alone had the right to choose the Liberal candidate, and in face of this the misgivings of many Federation members hardened into outright opposition.

All the arguments that had been used against Tom Griffiths's candidacy for the West Bromwich School Board 14 years earlier were revived, and at a conference of the Federation in July it was decided that a final decision on the matter of attempting to secure Juggins's nomination must be deferred.'

This meant, in effect, that the decision was made by default. As laid down at its Hanley Congress in 1890 the policy of the L.E.A. was to support only those candidates who were endorsed by a local trades council or by a 'properly organised Labour Federation.' Juggins's proposed candidacy was now clearly outside this category and the move to secure his nomination simply petered out. The Dudley Liberal Association eventually brought forward the Honourable Howard Spensley, a London banker, as prospective candidate and he was duly endorsed by the Federation.[28]

The part played by the Dudley Liberal Association in this episode was a prime example of the truth of T.R. Threlfall's contention that

> theoretically the (Liberal) caucus is a perfect machine, but in practice it is one sided ----- It has served its purpose and it has carried the people through one state of their development: but as it exists today it is too narrow and too much hampered with class prejudice to be a reflex of the expanding democratic and labour sentiment.[29]

The growing disenchantment of Black Country working men with the narrowness and class prejudice of the Liberal Party machine and the leadership's preoccupation

with Home Rule was revealed by the further decline of Liberal strength at the general election of July 1892. There was no contest in either Wolverhampton South or Wolverhampton East, where large personal followings left C.P. Villiers and Henry Fowler virtually unassailable. In the other seven constituencies there were straight fights between Gladstonian Liberals and Conservatives and in only one of these — Worcestershire North — where there were special circumstances, was the Gladstonian candidate returned. In this division the main factor in the Liberal success was the large personal vote of Benjamin Hingley. He was a well respected coal and ironmaster, and president of the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board. After being elected as a Liberal in 1885 he had been returned unopposed as a Liberal Unionist in 1886, but had now reverted to Gladstonism. He was returned by a big majority, 2,158 votes, but this was still a considerable reduction on the majority of 3,617 he had secured in 1885, and his share of the vote was down by over 10%.

The returns in other constituencies were even more revealing. In three of the four divisions contested in both 1886 and 1892 the Liberal share of the vote declined and in one of these — Wolverhampton West — the number of votes polled by the Liberal candidate fell. The exception was Dudley, where the swing to the Conservatives between 1885 and 1886 had been a phenomenal 6.9%, and

where the Liberal candidate in 1892 proved to hold particularly progressive opinions on labour questions. Here the Liberal share of the vote increased by 4.5%.

In the country generally there was a reversion to Gladstonism and in the new House of Commons the Liberals, with the support of the Irish, secured a majority of 40 seats. There were 273 Liberals, 81 Irish Nationalists and one Independent Labour MP as against 268 Conservatives and 47 Liberal Unionists. The Independent Labour member was Keir Hardie, elected in West Ham South by a majority of 1,232 in a straight fight with a Tory. His election, together with the fluidity of the national situation and working class dissatisfaction with the extent of the economic reforms envisaged in the Liberal Party's 'Newcastle Programme,' greatly encouraged the advocates of an independent labour party and at the T.U.C. conference in the autumn, with Hardie as their 'natural rallying point' the independents gathered to consider their next step. The immediate outcome was a decision to summon a national conference of delegates from local bodies with the object of establishing a labour party, and at Bradford on 13 and 14 January 1893 the Independent Labour Party was founded.[30]

The first branches of the Independent Labour Party established in the Black Country were those formed in Wolverhampton in October 1893, and in Walsall and Bilston during the following year.[31] In all three towns

recruitment was very slow and at the general election of July 1895 the party was in no position to run a candidate in any of the Black Country constituencies, or to intervene effectively in other ways.

The election was brought about by Gladstone's retirement from the leadership of the Liberal Party in 1894 after a disagreement with the majority of his Cabinet over the proposals of the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Spencer, for increased naval expenditure. Lord Rosebery succeeded him as Prime Minister but was unable to hold the government together for long and he resigned in June 1895. Lord Salisbury took office again and formed a coalition ministry of Conservatives and Liberal Unionists before asking for a dissolution early in July. The circumstances of the election meant that the Liberals had no new programme in 1895 and they had to fight the election on their record and on the major proposals which had been before the House of Commons at the time of the dissolution — Local Option, Welsh Disestablishment and Home Rule.

None of these proposals had a strong appeal to working men, and in the Black Country the growing irrelevance of Liberal policies to working class problems was brought into sharp focus by the influence of Joseph Chamberlain. At this time Chamberlain still retained much of his local reputation 'as a leader of

popular Radicalism, still concerned as he had been before 1886, for social reform and the maintenance of non-conformist interests.'[32] These factors and the coincidence of the election with a downturn in industrial activity meant that labour leaders, who remained mostly Gladstonians, faced considerable difficulties in their attempts to mobilise working class support for Liberal candidates.

These difficulties were reflected in the outcome of the election in the Black Country divisions. Six constituencies were contested and in only one of these was a Gladstonian Liberal returned. This was Wolverhampton East, where the personal vote of Sir Henry Fowler, as he had lately become, gave a majority of more than 1,000 votes over the Conservative, Rupert Kettle. The most striking result was in Worcestershire North, where a Gladstonian was opposed by a Liberal Unionist. Three years previously a Gladstonian candidate had been returned with a majority of more than 2,100 votes over a Conservative, taking 62.7% of the poll. Now the Liberal Unionist was returned with a majority of 988, securing 55.5% of the vote. Some of this big turnover of votes was undoubtedly due to divisions within the Liberal Party and the withdrawal of Sir Benjamin Hingley, as he now was, as their candidate. His former doubts about Home Rule had revived to the point where he felt unable to accept nomination by the Liberal Party and much of his personal

vote was lost in consequence, but the attractions of Chamberlainism for the working men of the Black Country are obvious.[33]

In the other four constituencies which were contested Gladstonian Liberals were opposed by Conservatives. All four had been fought on similar lines in 1892 and comparison of the results in that year with those of 1895 indicates quite clearly that there was no recovery of Liberalism in the Black Country between these years. In two of these constituencies — Walsall and Wednesbury — both the absolute number of Liberal votes and their share of the vote declined again. In the other two — Wolverhampton West and Dudley — the Liberal share of the vote recovered, by 1.9% and 1.3% respectively, but in neither constituency was this attributable to any significant revival of the former commitment to principles of Liberalism. In Wolverhampton West there was an attractive local candidate in G.R. Thorne, a well respected solictor and Wolverhampton councillor, and in Dudley the growing disenchantment of working class voters with Brooke Robinson's reactionary attitudes was probably the main factor in the slightly improved Liberal showing.[34]

Continuing disaffection with the Liberal Party appears to have stimulated interest in the new Independent Labour Party and in 1896 and 1898 the party achieved its first successes in local government elections. In 1896

Evan Evans, a fruiterer, became the first Independent Labour Party member of Wolverhampton Town Council when he was elected in Graiseley Ward by a majority of 71 votes, and in February 1898 Harry Brockhouse won a seat on the West Bromwich School Board.[35] Brockhouse was an unusual figure among labour leaders in the Black Country. He was born into comfortable circumstances in 1868, the eldest son of John Brockhouse, owner of a small spring axle works which subsequently developed into a sizeable general engineering firm. On leaving school he declined to enter the family business and became instead a pupil teacher at a local Board School. He was an early recruit to the Independent Labour Party and mainly instrumental in establishing the West Bromwich branch in 1896, remaining a leading figure in it until his death in 1921.

There was no immediate follow through to Brockhouse's success in West Bromwich, but in Wolverhampton Evan Evans's victory encouraged the local party to think in terms of nominating a labour candidate for one of the parliamentary divisions of the town and during the following summer this matter was placed before the Wolverhampton Trades Council as a positive proposal. The constituency suggested for a possible contest was Wolverhampton South.[36] Since its creation by the Redistribution Act of 1885 this division had been represented by C. P. Villiers. He had joined the Unionist wing of the Liberal Party at the time

of the Home Rule split but such was his stature and authority — he had represented Wolverhampton continuously since 1835 — that no Gladstonian candidate had dared challenge the 'grand old man' and the constituency had never been contested. As a result none of the three major parties had established more than a token organisation in the constituency and in an overwhelmingly working class area this situation seemed to offer a good opportunity for a labour candidate to make a strong showing. As Villiers was now 95 and in failing health it seemed certain that the constituency would be contested at the next general election, if not before, and the Independent Labour Party accordingly urged the Trades Council to take urgent action on the matter of a labour candidate.

Despite the apparently promising circumstances in Wolverhampton South the Independent Labour Party's initiative received only luke-warm support from the Trades Council. The president of the council, William Price, pointed out that they

> had no mandate from the trade unions regarding a labour candidate and no authority to pledge trade unionists of the rank and file to any course of action ----- The Council's efforts on behalf of labour registration had so far been of a local character.

The Trades Council accordingly decided to defer any further consideration of the question until such time as the name of a particular candidate should be before the constituency.[37]

When the Independent Labour Party turned to Dudley Trades Council for support the response was even less encouraging. This body was established in 1892 and in its early days it had adopted two resolutions on labour representation. These were that no parliamentary or other candidates should be recommended or adopted until the opinions of the constituents of trades' representatives had been obtained, and that the only way to secure effective working class representation on local bodies was through the formation of a branch of the Independent Labour Party.[38] The latent contradiction between these resolutions was clearly revealed when the question of support for a possible labour candidate for Wolverhampton South was raised at the council's meeting of July 1897.

The suggestion by Thomas Evans, the secretary of the Dudley branch of the Independent Labour Party, that an independent labour candidate would have a 'splendid chance' in Wolverhampton South brought the rejoinder that 'Keir Hardie is a madman when he starts to talk,' and that Thomas Mann was not much better. The chairman advised that 'as a Council they should not support Socialism' and a decision was deferred. When the question was brought before the Council's August meeting Thomas Mansell observed that the attitude displayed by the Independent Labour Party at the recent Brightside by-election 'had convinced him that they were failing to fulfil the representation of labour, and were rapidly

playing into the hands of capitalism.' Other opinions expressed ranged from the remark that 'I.L.P. men would not work for themselves, wanted everybody else to work for them and wanted what other people worked for,' to John Taylor's contention that they should 'let Dudley attend to Dudley and not be running after everybody's business and forgetting their own at the same time,' and it was unanimously decided to take no action in the matter.[39]

The question was then allowed to lapse and when the death of Villiers on 16 December 1897 brought about a by-election in the following February the Liberal Unionist candidate J.L. Gibbons, a Sedgley ironmaster, was opposed by G.R. Thorne, Thorne's radical nonconformity, his support for local option and his opposition to compulsory vaccination all made him an attractive candidate to organised labour and both Benjamin Dean and Albert Stanley, now a Staffordshire County Councillor, took an active part in his campaign.[40]

The local branches of the Independent Labour Party, however, were divided. Alfred Fellows, secretary of the Wolverhampton Independent Labour Party, was quick to point out that any assertions that his members were pleased with the Liberal Party's choice of candidate were not correct, and any decision as to who they would support must be deferred pending a decision from the National Administrative Council on whether to run an

Independent Labour Party candidate. On the other hand the Independent Labour Party in Bilston, whose members came 'chiefly from the advanced section of the Liberal Party,' which 'contained as many earnest Socialists as there are members of the Wolverhampton and Bilston branches of the Independent Labour Party put together,' enthusiastically endorsed Thorne.[41]

When the National Administrative Council decided not to bring forward an Independent Labour Party candidate confusion multiplied. An Independent Labour Party meeting in Sedgley resolved to support Gibbons, while the conflicting attitudes of the Wolverhampton and Bilston branches towards Thorne hardened into mutual hostility over unsubstantiated allegations made by the officials of the Wolverhampton party that they had received offers of 'Liberal gold' to keep out of the Sedgley area of the constituency.[42] The indecision and uncertainty of the Independent Labour Party about their attitude to Thorne undoubtedly cost him a number of working class votes, and this may well have been the decisive factor in his defeat by only 111 votes in a total poll of more than 8,000.

The Wolverhampton South by-election proved to be the last parliamentary contest in the Black Country before the formation of the Labour Representation Committee marked the beginning of a new era in British politics. In only 14 years and four general elections the political

situation in the area had been completely transformed, and the former almost unchallengeable strength of the Liberal Party had been reduced to a position where it held only one out of nine seats. The 'socialist boom' of the mid 1890s had largely by-passed the Black Country so that the beneficiaries of the movement away from Liberalism had been the Conservative Party and the Liberal Unionists, and with trades unionism also remaining weak the new labour party faced many difficulties as it sought to establish itself in the area.

Notes to Chapter Eleven on pages 533-536

C H A P T E R T W E L V E

POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND ORGANISATION:

THE ADVENT OF THE LABOUR PARTY 1900-1914

Doubts and uncertainties. By 1900 the 'socialist boom' of the middle 1890s had run its course and the accompanying rapid expansion of the Independent Labour Party had ended. The total of the Independent Labour Party's affiliation fees dropped from a peak of £450 in 1897-8 to just over £300 in 1900 and the Annual Report of 1900 recorded only 51 branches with about 4,000 paying members. These developments made it abundantly clear that there was no immediate prospect of a party based on individual membership developing into a real labour party with the mass support of working men behind it, and the leadership had come to accept that the trade unions themselves must be induced to take up labour politics, in their collective capacity.[1]

Concurrently with this, within the trade union movement there had developed a growing awareness of the need for independent political action and at the T.U.C. conference of 1899 this culminated in the adoption of a resolution, moved by J.H. Holmes on behalf of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, instructing the Parliamentary Committee to convene a special congress of representatives from 'co-operative, socialistic, trade union and other working organisations ----- to devise

ways and means for securing the return of an increased number of labour members to the next Parliament.'[2]

The conference met on 27 February 1900 in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London. With delegates mindful of 'the need for the largest possible degree of unanimity' the business of the conference was conducted in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and proceeded uneventfully. The most important decision of the conference was its rejection of the attempt by the Social Democratic Federation to bind it to socialism and 'a recognition of the class war,' and the acceptance of the amendment moved by Keir Hardie for the Independent Labour Party, limiting its aims to the establishment of

> ----- a distinct Labour group in Parliament, who shall have their own whips, and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to co-operate with any party which for the time being may be engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interests of labour, and be equally ready to associate themselves with any party in opposing measures having an opposite tendency -----

The other resolutions were either non-controversial or comparatively unimportant, and with the formation of an executive committee consisting of one member from the Fabian Society, two members each from the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation and seven trade unionists the Labour Representation Committee was formed.[3]

Within only eight months of its formation the new party was faced with a general election. By August 1900 the Boer War appeared to be coming to a victorious

conclusion and judging the moment opportune to seek a renewal of its mandate, in September the government dissolved Parliament. With no central funds to finance contests the Labour Representation Committee could do no more than endorse the candidates sponsored by its constituent bodies and it was represented in only 16 constituencies.[4] Predictably none of these were Black Country divisions. Only two national unions had any sizeable basis of organisation in the area — the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and the Associated Iron and Steel Workers — and neither had affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee. Nor had any of the local craft societies belonging to the Midland Counties Trades Federation, and with the events leading up to the by-election in Wolverhampton South still a recent memory the local branches of the Independent Labour Party made no move, either to bring forward candidates of their own or to endorse those of other parties.

Inevitably in the country at large the election was dominated by the related issues of imperialism and the South African War. The divisions within the Liberal Party on these issues ran wide and deep, and it entered the election 'demoralised and rent with dissension. It never expected to win the election and it never really tried.'[5] This was revealed in the large number of seats the party allowed to go uncontested. Herbert Gladstone, the Liberal chief whip 'ransacked the country'

for money and candidates but many constituencies 'refused to fight' and 143 seats in England, Wales and Scotland finally fell to Conservatives and Unionists without a contest.[6]

The disorganisation of the Liberal Party nationally was reflected in the Black Country where the Conservatives and Liberal Unionist members were challenged in only four of the eight constituencies they held, but paradoxically the election also witnessed some resurgence of Liberal strength. The backwardness of the area, much of which 'had not changed very noticeably in the sixty years since Disraeli drew a grim picture of it ----- in his Sybil,'[7] enabled Liberal candidates to emphasise their claim that for the working class this was 'as much a social-reform election as a war election'[8] and the closer association of the Liberal Party with concern for social issues won back some of working class votes which had become detached from Liberalism since 1886. Together with some weakening of Chamberlainism, caused by pro-Boer sentiment among nonconformists and their dismay at the government's apparent unconcern with the social evils of drink and the growth of Ritualism in the Church, this was sufficient to win two of the four contested seats for the Liberals, the first Liberal gains from Conservatives or Liberal Unionists at a general election in the area since 1886.[9]

The Liberal victories were in Walsall and Wolverhampton South. In Walsall, despite the prosperity

which war had brought to the saddlery trade, the vigorous campaign of Sir A.D. Hayter on questions of social reform reversed the result of 1895 and brought him victory over the Tory, Sidney Gedge. Gedge had alienated many of his supporters by voting against the Church Benefices, Bill and Hayter's strategy of attacking government extravagance in the payment of doles to landlords and the clergy was designed to take advantage of the division among his opponents and force them into a difficult defensive position. It succeeded admirably. Gedge's election address was largely a defence of the government's inaction on social reform, and at election meetings he was forced to reply to accusations that he had broken his election promise of 1895 to work for old age pensions and that he did not wish to see them enacted. At the poll on 3 October working class voters rallied to the call of Benjamin Dean and William Millerchip, who were both now Liberal councillors, to support Hayter, and he took 782 of the 922 extra votes polled, securing a majority of 325.[10]

The contest in Wolverhampton South turned mainly on the personalities of the two candidates. Neither of the candidates who had contested the by-election in 1898 stood again. G.R. Thorne was replaced by Henry Norman, and for the Liberal Unionists Major W. Oulton took over from J.L. Gibbons. Norman was a former assistant editor of the Daily Chronicle and had been the man mainly responsible for organising the fund of £20,000 raised by

his newspaper for the relief of miners during the 1893 lock-out. He was accordingly enthusiastically supported by Tom Mansell, Benjamin Dean and Albert Stanley as 'the miner's friend' and 'likely to be of invaluable service to the working classes,' and this undoubtedly won back some of the working class support that had gone to Gibbons in 1898.[11] Major Oulton's endorsement of Chamberlain's extreme position on the South African War lost him many nonconformist votes and between these two factors Norman was returned with a majority of 169.

The election results over the country generally revealed how little importance contemporary opinion attached to the decision of the trade union movement to enter politics as the ally of socialism. Only two Labour Representation Committee candidates were returned to the new House of Commons. These were Keir Hardie and Richard Bell, secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, elected in Merthyr and Derby respectively. Both were elected jointly with Liberals in two member constituencies and in the Commons Bell, whose adoption in Derby had predated the formation of the Labour Representation Committee, identified more closely with Liberalism than with the cause of independent labour.[12]

The modest success achieved by the new party was reflected in the subdued proceedings at its first Annual Conference in February 1901. The delegates of the Boot and Shoe Operatives sounded an optimistic note, with a

confident declaration that 'if the same zeal is applied to the business of the Committee during the next twelve months, as during the past year, there is every reason to believe that the organisation will work itself thoroughly into shape, and have great weight in guiding the destiny of democratic politics,' but the business was mainly of a routine character. The delegates resolved that before putting in hand any further expansion of activity it would be sensible to allow trade union affiliations to build up further. These currently stood at only 353,000 which compared unfavourably both with the 570,000 trade unionists who had been represented at the foundation conference twelve months earlier and with a total trade union membership of more than 1,900,000, but this picture was soon dramatically altered by events outside the political sphere.[13]

In July 1901 the House of Lords gave judgement in the Taff Vale case. The effect of this was to render a trade union liable in its registered name for a tortious act committed on its behalf, and the imperative need to secure its reversal by legislation brought the unions into politics much more rapidly thany any amount of persuasion by the socialists could have done. Membership of the Labour Representation Committee increased to 626,613 by May 1902, and to 847,315 by the time of the party's third Annual Conference in February 1903.[14]

Very little of this expansion took place in the

Black Country. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain and the Associated Iron and Steel Workers remained unconvinced of the need for partisan political action, and so did most of the unions affiliated to the Midland Counties Trades Federation. One important labour organisation did, however, find itself 'throughly in accord with the object desired' by the Labour Representation Committee. This was Wolverhampton Trades Council, which had been alive to the need 'to advance the social position of the working men by legislation, whether imperial or local, -----' since 1890. It affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee in February 1902 and by the end of the year had the matter of labour representation for Wolverhampton actively in hand. A Labour Representation Committee of the Trades Council was formed and on the advice of Henry Moreton, secretary of the local branch of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives and formerly a member of its national executive council, his union was asked to suggest a possible candidate. The union recommended its parliamentary agent, T.F. Richards, and on 17 December 1902 he was accepted by the Labour Representation Committee of the Trades Council as prospective parliamentary candidate for one of the Wolverhampton divisions.[15]

'Freddy' Richards was a Wednesbury man by birth though most of his adult life had been spent away from the Black Country. He had joined the National Union of

Boot and Shoe Operatives in 1885 and in 1893 was elected junior vice-president of the Leicester branch. In 1894 he became vice-president and was also elected to Leicester Town Council on which he served for nine years. He became president of the union's Leicester branch in 1898 and in the following year was elected to the national executive council.[16] His prospective candidacy was enthusiastically endorsed by the full Trades Council and on 13 February 1903 he was presented to a mass meeting of trade unionists in St. George's Hall.[17]

By this time the possibility of running a labour candidate in the North Worcestershire division was also under review. This constituency had fallen to the Liberal Unionists in 1895 but many working men were now turning away from Chamberlainism and there were hopes that they might rally to a labour candidate. Accordingly, late in 1902 a Labour Election Committee for North Worcestershire was formed, consisting of members of the Birmingham and District Labour Representation Committee, the Midland Counties Trades Federation and the recently established Stourbridge Trades Council. On 2 January 1903 the secretary of the committee, Frank Spires, informed Ramsay Macdonald that there were 'some special and delicate features of the situation in this constituency,' and invited him to attend a conference of labour organisations in the division at which it was hoped to clarify the position.[18] When Macdonald had to

decline the invitation because the suggested date, 14 February, was too close to that fixed for the annual conference of the Labour Representation Committee, on 11 January Spires wrote to him again to offer 28 March as a date for the conference and to explain the position in the constituency.

This was that the strongest body of trade unionists, the miners, would like to see Albert Stanley brought forward as a candidate, but it was

> doubtful whether he would accept an offer to contest the seat as an Independent Labour man. A local man finds favour with the other unions —— Councillor Taylor of Dudley, sec. to the Midland Counties Trades Federation, to which most of the unions in the division are affiliated. He is very well known, and I believe would command the support of the miners as well. He would accept nomination as an Independent Labour candidate and would stand an excellent chance of success. We understand that his organisation would maintain him, if elected; but I am doubtful whether it would find all the election ex's. Stanley is an orator: Taylor is not brilliant in any way ----- The feeling in the constituency (N.W.) in favour of a Labour candidate appears to be very strong and general, and a good fight would have a most beneficial effect in this part of England.[19]

In spite of Spires' confident assertions there was in fact little real prospect of an independent labour candidacy in North Worcestershire. Neither the Midland Counties Trades Federation nor the Stourbridge Trades Council were affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee, and it was extremely unlikely that John Taylor would accept nomination as an independent labour candidate. He had strong ties with Liberalism in Dudley, where he had been a Liberal councillor for almost ten

years, and he had never made any public utterance to indicate that he was in any way inclined to break this association.

The situation in North Worcestershire, where a local Labour Representation Committee was involved with non-affiliated organisations in seeking to promote candidates of doubtful commitment to the cause of independent labour representation, was similar to that which had arisen in a number of other constituencies. The leadership of the Labour Representation Committee was uneasy about these developments, fearing that they might subvert the independence of the party and 'retain the Labour movement as an ally of Whiggism,'[20] and at the annual conference, held in Newcastle on Tyne on 20 and 21 February, important measures were taken to preserve the party's independence.

The first step was to defeat an amendment to the constitution of the party, moved by John Ward, chairman of the National Democratic League, which would have allowed his organisation to affiliate. The National Democratic League was a 'broad alliance of the political forces of the Left' formed in October 1900 largely on the initiative of W.M. Thompson, editor of Reynolds's Newspaper. From the outset it had been viewed with suspicion by the champions of independent labour representation, who regarded it as 'a diversion of effort and as likely to undo the work of the Labour Representation

Committee,' and their misgivings had recently been confirmed by the League's activities in Deptford, Jarrow and Stoke on Trent, where it had attempted to take the major share of the direction of labour candidates out of the hands of the Labour Representation Committee.[21]

Following the defeat of the National Democratic League's attempt to secure affiliation Pete Curran moved a resolution that members of the executive and 'officials of affiliated organisations' should not identify themselves with, or promote the interests of 'any section of the Liberal or Conservative parties.' By amendments in debate, candidates and Members of Parliament were placed under the same restrictions but other trade union officials were absolved from them, and the amended resolution, the so-called 'Newcastle Resolution,' was carried by 659,000 votes to 154,000.[22]

On the second day an equally important resolution, which had been drafted by the Fabian Society and accepted in principle by the 1902 conference, was passed. It provided for the establishment of a parliamentary fund for Labour Representation Committee candidates, to be raised by contributions from affiliated societies at an annual rate of one penny per member. The money was to be used to pay one-quarter of the returning officer's fees for each candidate approved by the Labour Representation Committee, and to pay elected members a salary of up to £200 per year. No payment was to be made until the fund reached £2,500, except in the event of a general

election.[23]

The decisions taken at the Newcastle conference were vitally important for the secret negotiations between Macdonald and Herbert Gladstone which had been put in hand earlier in February, regarding the possibilities of co-operation between the Labour Representation Committee and the Liberal Party at the next general election. The establishment of a parliamentary fund gave the Labour Representation Committee a cohesiveness it had hitherto lacked in that it emphasised that the party's candidates were representatives of the movement as a whole and not merely representatives of a particular trade. The Newcastle Resolution, while it did not exclude the possibility of local electoral 'arrangements,' placed the control of relations with other parties firmly in the hands of the Labour Representation Committee leadership. The combined effect of the two decisions was to discipline the membership and emphasise party solidarity, and in so doing it placed the Labour Representation Committee in a position of considerable strength in the negotiations.

The adoption of the Newcastle Resolution had immediate consequences for the situation in North Worcestershire, where it brought to an abrupt halt the move to bring forward a labour candidate. The postponed conference of labour organisations in the constituency was duly held in Dudley on 28 March. William Millerchip, who was currently president of the Midland Counties

Trades Federation, presided and Ramsay Macdonald was present as promised. A resolution 'in favour of a direct Labour candidate being run for the North Worcestershire Parliamentary Division at the next opportunity,' was adopted without difficulty, but in his address Macdonald stressed that the Labour Representation Committee

> would not be content with any Labour representation that was not independent. After the vote at Newcastle they must insist that all candidates receiving the approval of the Labour Representation Committee must stand as labour candidates and labour candidates only.'

He appealed to those present 'whether Liberals or Conservatives, to face new situations and new circumstances ----- to arm themselves with new weapons and pursue new roads,' but the working men of North Worcestershire were clearly not ready for such departures.[24] When both Albert Stanley and John Taylor predictably declined to stand as independent labour candidates the matter was pursued no further and at the election in 1906 the sitting Liberal Unionist was opposed by a Liberal.

In Wolverhampton no immediate problems followed from the decisions taken at Newcastle. Richards' prospective candidacy was in the hands of an affiliated organisation and there was no question at this stage of his independence being compromised by having to seek an accommodation with the local Liberals. This possibility had been averted by the decision of the Trades Council,

meeting on the evening before the Newcastle Conference, that Richards should contest the West division of the borough. Wolverhampton East had been held by the Liberals ever since its creation in 1885. Their party organisation in the division was strong and Sir Henry Fowler had built up a large personal following. By contrast, the West division had been a Conservative seat since 1892 and Liberal organisation was correspondingly weaker. No Liberal candidate had yet been adopted in the West division, and there seemed every possibility that the Liberals would allow Richards a clear field at the general election.[25]

The decisions of the Newcastle conference, and the effect they had in accelerating developments in the still secret negotiations between Macdonald and Herbert Gladstone, did, however, create considerable difficulties in Wednesbury. Though it had fallen to the Conservatives at the last three general elections Wednesbury was a highly marginal constituency. At none of these elections had the Conservative candidate polled more than 51% of the vote and when the sitting member, Walford Green, announced his intention not to contest the seat again there seemed good prospects of the Liberals re-capturing the seat if they could find a suitable candidate. In the early months of 1903, however, this seemed unlikely. Several names were being canvassed in the constituency, including the former Liberal member, the Honourable Philip Stanhope, and Charles Roberts and Enoch Horton,

the unsuccessful candidates in 1895 and 1900 respectively. Of these it appeared that only Stanhope would command much popular support and his intentions were uncertain.[26]

This highly uncertain situation between the two great parties encouraged hopes that a direct labour candidate might have some chance of success in the borough and the local branches of the Boilermakers' Society called a meeting of trade union and friendly society officials in the Baptist Schoolroom, Holyhead Road, on the Monday following the Newcastle conference of the Labour Representation Committee, 23 February. The chair was taken by William Sharrocks, the district agent of the Boilermakers' Society, who was also a member of the Independent Labour Party and a Wolverhampton town councillor.

Sharrocks opened the meeting by stating that his society had decided to 'put up a candidate for any division they thought offered an opportunity for his return as member,' and this was to be James Conley, a Glasgow city councillor and J.P. The society was prepared to pay Conley's expenses if they wanted him to come down to Wednesbury and address them, and also to bear any cost that would be incurred if he was returned as their representative. He then invited those present 'to express their views on the important question of going in for direct Labour representation.'

The first to do so was Tom Mansell, who had been a

Liberal member of Tipton Urban District Council for the past two years. His statement illustrated perfectly the thinking of Lib-Labs on the question of independent labour representation and in so doing anticipated the difficulties which were to arise over the attempt to get Conley adopted in Wednesbury. After acknowledging that 'the Miners Federation had Labour representatives in the House of Commons and found these very useful,' Mansell went on to say:

> With respect to the Wednesbury Borough so far as a Labour representative was concerned, if a candidate came forward and was adopted by the various Associations he was willing to stand on the same platform. Efforts had been made in the past to secure Liberal representation of the Borough, but these they had failed in since they lost one of their best men — the Honourable Philip Stanhope. If they could get another Stanhope to come into the Borough the Labour party who adopted a candidate in opposition to him would be doing wrong. This gentleman (Conley) was a thorough Trade Unionist and it was now almost impossible to find a Stanhope from the Liberal ranks ----- The Liberal '600' ought now, he considered, to see their way clear to adopt a Labour candidate, because the workers had made an effort on one or two occasions for them. Therefore he said 'Why not adopt a candidate from the Labour movement.' But if the Liberal '600' had decided upon a candidate, he should not advise the Trade Unionists to make a three cornered fight of it because if they did they were pretty certain to lose. What they wanted was amalgamation between the Liberal and Labour movements and if they could get that amalgamation then the seat was theirs.

Mansell was supported by Simeon Webb who also 'believed that if they could amalgamate the forces of Liberal and Labour there was a possibility of winning the

seat.' Obviously mindful of the obligation placed on him and his society by the Newcastle Resolution, Sharrocks was careful to point out that

> if they selected a Labour candidate he must go there and look after Labour first, Labour second and Labour always ----- Should they therefore decide to bring forward a Labour candidate at Wednesbury he should think the Liberals would submit to it with a good grace and that they would not oppose them. It was, he urged, not a Liberal seat, and they had a perfect right as workers to say they would have a candidate to represent them as they had been too much misrepresented in the past.

After further discussion the following resolution was put to the meeting:

> That this meeting of the workingmen of the Wednesbury Borough expresses its hearty approval of running a Labour candidate for this constituency and requests Mr. James Conley to address a series of meetings on dates to be arranged.

In the debate on this resolution Tom Mansell again insisted that "if they were to win the seat for Labour, it was absolutely necessary that they should have the support of the Liberal party,' but with the wording clearly leaving the way open for either a Lib-Lab candidate or an independent labour candidate he and his supporters were able to vote for it. Equally, those favouring an independent candidate were also able to accept the resolution and it was carried with only one vote against.[27]

Conley duly made three public appearances in the constituency during the second week of March. The theme of his address was the same on each occasion and clearly

revealed that Conley and the executive of the Boiler-makers' Society had quite failed to grasp the full implications of the Newcastle Resolution or indeed of the Labour Representation Committee constitution. He accepted the need to send representative working men to Parliament 'who would work and vote together on all questions which affected this particular class. Outside these questions he would certainly give them the right to exercise their own liberty. Amongst the Liberals, and he had been a Liberal all his life, he had many friends -----,' and he accordingly gave an assurance that he would stand aside if Philip Stanhope came forward.[28]

The Labour Representation Committee would clearly be unable to endorse a candidate holding these views, and growing uncertainty about the exact nature of Conley's candidacy was further increased by the claim made at one of his meetings by Tom Mansell, who stated that Conley had been invited to Wednesbury because 'it had appeared to the Boilermakers' Society that the Liberal Association had been very dilatory in bringing forward a candidate, and that the society were prepared to bring forward a candidate and pay his expenses if he was elected.'[29]

The situation in Wednesbury was brought to a head by developments elsewhere. Just at this moment the negotiations between Macdonald and Gladstone were being

successfully concluded. An understanding was reached that, while there could be no compact between the two parties and under no circumstances could the Liberal Council depart from the established principle of acting for and with recognised local Liberal associations, it would use its influence to persuade them from nominating Liberal candidates in certain circumstances.[30]

On 13 March Gladstone sent a memorandum to the Liberal leader, Campbell-Bannerman, embodying the points of the proposed understanding and enclosing a list of 39 constituencies where it might be necessary for the leadership to exercise its influence.

These constituencies were grouped into four categories, as follows:

difficulty (23 constituencies)	(1)	Where there is no
	(2)	Adjustable (5 constituencies)
	(3)	Claimed by Labour Representation Committee and
difficult (5 constituencies)	(4)	Available alternatives (6 constituencies)

Wolverhampton was listed in the first category, and Wednesbury in the fourth.[31] The constituencies listed in the category of available alternatives were those in which the Liberals might be able by choice of a suitable candidate to avoid having to make an outright concession to the Labour Representation Committee, and the current situation in Wednesbury gave cause for optimism on this score. The executive committee of the Wednesbury

Liberal Association now had before it a list of nine possible candidates, including the names of Stanhope, Conley and William Millerchip.[32] The selection of Stanhope would obviously resolve the position to the satisfaction of both the Liberal Association and most labour organisations in the constituency, while the choice of either Conley or Millerchip would at least pre-empt nomination of an independent labour candidate. The situation was in fact eventually resolved to the advantage of the Liberals, but in quite a different way from that anticipated by these calculations.

In the week following Gladstone's memorandum to Campbell-Bannerman Philip Stanhope finally announced his intention not to stand as the Liberal candidate for Wednesbury and on 30 March the general secretary of the Boilermakers' Society, D.C. Cummings, made a formal application to the Labour Representation Committee for ratification of Conley's candidacy. With Conley's recent appearances in Wednesbury clearly in mind Macdonald's reply merely drew the attention of Conley and the Boilermakers' Society executive council to the Newcastle Resolution, and asked for any observations they might have on it. This brought an angry rejoinder from Cummings, pointing out that Macdonald himself had 'attended a meeting at Dudley under the chairmanship of Councillor Millerchip, (the meeting of 28 March - E.T.) who had abjectly bound himself to be bound by the

Wednesbury Liberal 600's decision,' while Conley had deliberately refused to do so. Cummings went on to add that

> if Coun: Millerchip is in any way connected with the Labour Representation Committee he should be immediately taken to task as the Labour party had adopted Conley before Millerchip was heard of in that connection and only comes forward to help the Liberal 600 to defeat the chances of Conley.
>
> J. Conley, Phillip (sic) Stanhope, E. Horton, Coun: Millerchip and others were asked by the Liberals if they were willing to abide by the decision of that body as to who should run. Conley alone refused to do so. Millerchip jumped at the chance of agreeing and it seems to me that the Labour Representation Committee could hold a similar meeting as that held in Dudley with advantage to all concerned.[33]

In an attempt to clarify the position S. Ford, a member of the Boilermakers' Society and secretary to the committee handling Conley's proposed candidacy, was instructed to call a conference of labour organisations 'to consider the formation of a local committee of the Labour Representation Committee ----- and generally consider the reaffirmation of Conley's acceptance as Labour candidate for the Division and other matters appertaining to the present position.'[34] The meeting was held on 23 May and on the same evening Harry Brockhouse, who had been watching developments in Wednesbury very closely, wrote to Macdonald with an account of the proceedings. This letter identifies precisely the forces at work in Wednesbury and also

illuminates vividly the strains inherent in the Liberal-Labour ententes. Brockhouse reported as follows:

> 1. A letter was read from the Boilermakers Executive offering to finance Conley and to run him apart from Labour Representation Committee rules, simply as a Labor (sic) man, if desirable,
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> 2. It was admitted the B.makers were affiliated but Coun: Millerchip (Walsall lock makers) said they (the B.makers) had not paid their affiliation fees to the Labour Representation Committee and if they found the money for Conley they were free to ignore the Labour Representation Committee.
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> 3. Conley had written a letter (evidently intended for Liberal Labor ears) deprecating the Labour Representation Committee attitude and the Newcastle conference and saying it was led away by a small noisy section —— the Independent Labour Party who were less than 20,000 membership.
>
> 4. Two Liberal Labor men (Mansell miners agent and Millerchip) carried the majority of meeting against Independent Labor.
>
> 5. The meeting was small and mostly old Liberals.
>
> 6. The Liberals cannot get a candidate and want to capture the Labor man. The first move as shewn this day was to elbow Conley out in favour of Millerchip, who is a Liberal tool. If Millerchip can get himself adopted by the local Labor Council he will accept Liberal nomination and the trick is done.35

When Macdonald apparently expressed his doubts about whether the Boilermakers were in fact contemplating running Conley outside Labour Representation Committee rules, on 17 June Brockhouse wrote to him

again, confirming his impression that this was in fact the case and spelling out his doubts about the possibility of getting an independent labour candidate to Wednesbury.[36] The position was that Ford was the brother of a Liberal agent and all his family were old Liberals. His 'chief pal' was Tom Mansell '— one of Alb. Stanley's lot;' and there was now a move by the Lib-Labs to freeze Conley out because he was hampered, from their standpoint, by Labour Representation Committee rules and 'to get Alb. Stanley or Millerchip adopted by local Labor men who will then be endorsed or nominated by the Liberals. If Conley would stiffen his back they could not shift him because he brings his own funds and the other lot have none at present.'

Brockhouse also informed Macdonald that he had formed a local committee to promote independent labour representation, with R. Reynolds, chairman of the Wednesbury branch of the Boilermakers' Society, as secretary. The immediate objective was to get 500 voters to pledge themselves to support an independent labour candidate, but who would vote Tory in the event of a Lib-Lab candidate being nominated. He concluded by declaring his intention

> at all costs ----- to block the Liberals who cannot get a bone fide (sic) candidate of their own. ----- A more miserable crew than these Liberal Labor men I never saw. Their position is bolstered up by the wobbling of Cummings and Conley. You can use my name or that of R. Reynolds as witness against him.[37]

This move by Brockhouse placed Conley in an impossible position. If he ran as a Lib-Lab candidate he would encounter active opposition from the Wednesbury Labour League, as Brockhouse was calling his organisation, and in a highly marginal constituency this would almost certainly guarantee his defeat. Equally, if he acknowledged the Newcastle Resolution and secured the endorsement of the Labour Representation Committee as an independent candidate, he would alienate the Lib-Labs. If he was then involved in a three cornered fight, and there was of course no guarantee of a clear field in Wednesbury, he would certainly lose.

The Wednesbury Liberal Association declared its intentions at the end of June when it adopted a prospective candidate in Clarendon Hyde, of Southampton, the managing partner of Pearson and Company, a leading firm of civil engineers and public works contractors.[38] This finally destroyed what lingering hopes there remained of Conley conducting a successful campaign and in the first week of July the executive council of the Boilermakers' Society announced its decision to withdraw from Wednesbury.[39] By this time Harry Brockhouse's Labour League had almost obtained the 500 pledges to independent labour that it was seeking and tentative approaches were made to the Bricklayers' Union to send one of its four prospective candidates to Wednesbury.[40] Nothing materialised, and the election when it came was a straight fight between Clarendon Hyde and the Conservative, A.F. Bird.

The decision of the Wednesbury Liberal Association had been prompted by expectation of an early general election. In May Joseph Chamberlain had launched his campaign for tariff reform and his obvious disagreement with his Conservative colleagues in the Cabinet seemed certain to bring about the break-up of the government. This contingency made it imperative that the understanding about co-operation between the Labour Representation Committee and the Liberals at an election, already tentatively concluded between Gladstone and Macdonald, should be confirmed and the final commitment was made during September. There was no formal alliance. The Labour Representation Committee did not ask the Liberals to endorse its political principles, but in return for a clear field in about 30 constituencies it agreed to 'demonstrate friendliness' towards Liberal candidates in any constituency where it had influence. For their part the Liberal leadership recognised the need for more labour representation in the House of Commons, and they were willing to assist in bringing this about by using pressure to prevent Liberal opposition to any 'recognised Labour candidate' who supported 'the general objects of the Liberal Party.' At the same time the Liberal leaders were careful to stress again that the Liberal Council could not infringe the autonomy of local associations.[41]

<u>The false dawn</u>. The narrow limits of co-operation set by the agreement reflected, on the Labour Representation

Committee side, Macdonald's conviction that any more comprehensive arrangement would endanger the unity of the party by alienating the Independent Labour Party and also reduce the chances of winning support from Conservative working men.[42] The soundness of this judgement, at least on the first count, had already been provisionally demonstrated by the recent events in Wednesbury and it would eventually be revealed again in Wolverhampton by developments set in motion by a decision of the executive council of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, taken shortly after the conclusion of the Liberal-Labour understanding.

The Macdonald-Gladstone agreement, of course, remained a closely guarded secret known only to a few of the principle party leaders on either side. Constituency organisations and trade unions continued their preparations for the anticipatedelection in complete ignorance of its existence, and at their meeting of 26 October 1903 the executive council of the Boot and Shoe Operatives' Union unknowingly took a decision about the direction of Fred Richards' campaign in Wolverhampton West that cut right across Macdonald's calculations. The council adopted the following resolution:

> That this Council fully recognising that their candidate for West Wolverhampton cannot succeed without a sufficient number of votes, hereby expresses their opinion that the only way to insure success will be by asking for and accepting the help of any prominent or public person, and we fully believe that to

ask for the support of any of the other parties will not contravene the objects of our Union or the principles of the Labour Representation Committee, and trust that the local Labour Representation Committee will adopt and act upon this resolution.[43]

Despite its neutral wording the resolution was clearly intended to open the way for co-operation with the Liberals. As such Fred Richards, though a member of the Independent Labour Party, offered no objection to it. He was fully aware that there was little commitment to the cause of independent labour representation anywhere in the Black Country. His local election committee also found no difficulty in accepting the union's recommendation and the broad lines of Richards' campaign strategy were agreed.

It is not known if a direct approach was made to the West Wolverhampton Liberal Association at this stage. It seems unlikely that there was, but their probable reaction was demonstrated at a labour rally in the Agricultural Hall on 18 November. Just before the start of the meeting G.R. Thorne, twice a Liberal candidate in Wolverhampton and currently Deputy Mayor of the town, arrived in the hall, apparently uninvited. He was asked by the chairman to join Richards and Ramsay Macdonald on the platform, and on his doing so there was 'an enthusiastic outburst of cheering, which was repeated again and again, as though the meeting desired to make no mistake about the heartiness of its appreciation,'

and the decision to seek Liberal co-operation was in effect sealed by public acclamation.[44]

The meeting in the Agricultural Hall was held in the expectation that a dissolution was imminent, but Balfour succeeded in holding the government together and there was no election in the autumn of 1903. Fred Richards nevertheless continued to campaign vigorously in Wolverhampton and with his 'attractive personality ----- pleasing voice ----- great fairness and moderation,' he began to build a considerable following in his constituency.[45] His speeches demonstrated quite clearly his support for 'the general objects of the Liberal Party' and some time after the meeting in the Agricultural Hall he was given an assurance by G.R. Thorne that he would not be exposed to a three cornered fight, and that if the co-operation of the Liberal Party was definitely and openly requested it would be granted.[46]

Other quite open and explicit gestures of Liberal support followed, and their encouragement of his candidacy was acknowledged in Richards' election address, published at the end of March 1905. It read as follows:

Friends,

As many of my supporters have asked me to more fully explain our attitude towards the Liberal and Conservative parties in this Division, let me say that as the Liberal party have seen fit, up to the present, not to nominate a candidate, we feel that by such an act, they are convinced that we have much in common; we appreciate this attitude exceedingly, and if the Conservative party were equally as generous, we should have another

'Clitheroe.' As this, however, is not likely to happen, we must make ourselves sufficiently clear, so as not to deceive anyone.

Our first aim then is the establishment of a Labour party, and to this end we heartily invite and welcome the assistance of all reformers, irrespective of party or class, who recognise the need of a Labour party, whose aims are industrial and educational rather than political. Our Ward Committees are composed largely of men who hitherto have worked in separate political camps, and who at last have found common cause by setting aside party allegiance for principles laid down by organised labour. We are uncompromisingly opposed to the present Government, owing to the small amount of good work done by them, and the great injustices they are responsible for. It is our hope that there will be such a large number of Labour representatives returned to Parliament at the coming General Election as to warn the incoming Government that measures, not men, must in future be the order of the day, and the people must be served first and always, and that parties should exist only as organisations of public opinion rather than to help its adherents at the cost and expense of the nation. The Labour party stands for the greatest good for all —— economically, morally and financially -----,

and there followed a list of policy objectives largely indistinguishable from those of most Liberal candidates.[47]

Through the summer and autumn of 1905 the pace of political activity quickened once more as it became increasingly clear that Balfour's efforts to unite his party on the fiscal question had failed, and that a general election could not be long delayed. Together with candidates everywhere Fred Richards intensified his campaign in Wolverhampton West, and once again he received the full co-operation of the Liberal Association.

Liberal Party workers were recruited to help with canvassing and other routine tasks of electioneering, and leading figures in the party appeared at Richards' meetings. At one of these, a mass meeting of the unemployed in Market Square on 3 September, G.R. Thorne openly told those present that 'the only practical way for them to do something was to vote for their candidate, Mr. T.F. Richards.'[48]

On 4 December Balfour finally submitted his resignation leaving the Liberal leader, Campbell-Bannerman, to compose the factions of his own party sufficiently to form an alternative government. Divisions over Home Rule within the Liberal Party made this seem unlikely, and with the election apparently imminent Fred Richards' election committee immediately decided to appoint a six man delegation to approach the West Wolverhampton Liberal Association and if possible negotiate an electoral alliance between the two parties.[49] When the delegation met a sub-committee of the Liberal Association on 6 December the leader Tom Jones, explained the reasons for this move.

> They were satisfied that, anxious as they were to get a Labour representative returned, it was impossible to do so on Labour lines exclusively, and they knew their programme included everything Liberals desired ----- Labour men ----- asked Liberals to travel with them as far on the road as they cared, and leave them when they felt inclined to drop out.[50]

The negotiations were concluded successfully, and on 11 December the executive council of the Liberal Association resolved 'that in the interest of Liberal principles the co-operation asked for be heartily accorded, and that all Liberals in the division be urged to work and vote for the return of the Labour candidate.'[51]

This development alarmed Macdonald. As well as infringing both the Labour Representation Committee constitution and the Newcastle Resolution the Wolverhampton agreement went far beyond what was envisaged in the understanding negotiated with Herbert Gladstone. He immediately wrote to Richards to demand an explanation and pending this offered a provisional assessment that the move was 'a profound mistake and one which will probably lose the seat.'[52]

In reply Richards enclosed a copy of the resolution adopted by his union executive on 26 October 1903, and enlarged upon the events leading up to the conclusion of the alliance. He reminded Macdonald that he had been present at the meeting in the Agricultural Hall in November 1903 when G.R. Thorne had joined them on the platform, and went on to say that from that time Thorne had been 'publicly spoken ill of ----- and told me privately he wished me success and hoped for Labour's triumph but he could not after such treatment help us unless publicly invited -----.' Thorne had then stated, (in a speech to a Liberal conference in Wednesbury on

8 November 1905 - E.T.), that 'the Labour Party of West Wolverhampton refused help.' As a result a strong movement to establish a basis of co-operation between Labour and the Liberals had developed in the constituency, and this had culminated in the meeting between the parties on 6 December and the conclusion of the pact. Richards emphasised that 'we made no conditions neither would we and each organisation is to keep its independance (sic). Up to the present we have not heard a single dissentient voice and the local people are delighted and the Tories nonplussed.'[53]

Macdonald was far from satisfied with this explanation and other members of the Labour Representation Committee executive committee also 'took a very serious view of what is going on in Wolverhampton.' Macdonald reminded Richards that the test to be applied to any dealings with the Liberals must be: 'Can you do the same thing with the Conservatives and still retain your Liberal support? If you cannot you are committing yourselves to the Liberal Party.' The Wolverhampton agreement, it seemed clear, did not meet this test and Richards had 'been very unwise ----- to cross the line for the sake of support which after all will not amount to a great deal.'[54]

The Labour Leader was also strongly critical, describing the move as giving away the whole position of political independence, and Keir Hardie promptly cancelled

an engagement to speak in Wolverhampton.[55] Richards and his union executive remained unrepentant. Richards pointed out to Macdonald that his candidacy was being financed by his union not by the Independent Labour Party, and that both the union and his local election committee had agreed unanimously to the suggestion of negotiating an alliance with the Liberals. He also drew attention to the situation in Halifax where James Parker, a member of the Independent Labour Party Council, was being opposed by one Liberal and one Conservative in a two-member division and was advising the electors to vote for the Liberal as well as himself; and he volunteered the opinion that Macdonald himself must eventually come to an understanding with the Liberals in Leicester, where he and Henry Broadhurst were opposing two Conservatives for two seats. If no understanding were reached Richards feared that many voters would 'plump' for Broadhurst or Macdonald and by doing so let in one or both of the Conservatives.[56]

By the time of this latest letter from Richards to Macdonald, 24 December, the long expected election had at last been called. Feeling that an early election would enable the Liberals to capitalise most effectively on the divisions within the late government on the fiscal question Campbell-Bannerman had dissolved Parliament on 20 December and polling had been fixed for mid-January.

Inevitably, free trade was the main issue of the campaign. In addition there were also a number of secondary issues arising from the Conservative government's record; the Education Act of 1902, and all the problems arising out of the South African War, especially the use of Chinese labour in the Transvaal.

The question of the nation's trading arrangements was particularly pertinent in the Black Country. The decline of the south Staffordshire coal and iron industries was well advanced and many of the area's traditional trades were suffering from the effects of increasing foreign competition. In Walsall, for example, there was considerable unemployment among the leather workers and one of the busiest establishments in the town was the labour yard, where the out of work were engaged in levelling an old mound, known locally as 'Poverty Knob,' by 'wheeling barrowfuls of dirt from nowhere to nowhere.'[57] The glass trade was also depressed and many glass workers had joined the Trade Union Tariff Reform Association, formed in 1904 and dedicated to strengthening the cause of trade unionism by employing the tariff to protect it against unfair competition, and to advocating the adoption of preferential tariffs in order to consolidate the Empire and to secure markets for British goods.[58]

William Bradford, secretary of the Dudley branch of the Flint Glassmakers' Association, was a leading member of the Trade Union Tariff Reform Association, and his

views on protection and imperial preference were shared by another leading working class figure in Dudley, W.H. Hobbiss, a former vice-president of the Trades Council. Both campaigned vigorously for the Conservative candidate for Dudley, G.H. Claughton, with Hobbiss advising his 'numerous working men friends in Dudley and district to vote for Claughton and unity of the Empire and allow Mr. Hooper plenty of leisure "to stew in his Home Rule juice".'[59]

This, however, was a minority view among leaders of organised labour in the Black Country. Much more typical was Tom Mansell's call to working men 'to vote for Hooper and peace, plenty and progress,' and John Taylor's claim that 'protection could not possibly increase but must decrease wages. Those among them who could remember Protection in the forties wanted no more of that system.'[60] Mansell, Taylor, Benjamin Dean, William Millerchip, Tom Sitch and even William Aucott, who was now 75, all campaigned energetically for the free trade candidates, and with the issue of the Education Act also rallying nonconformists to their old Liberal loyalties candidates representing various shades of progressive opinion were returned in eight of the nine Black Country constituencies. The exception was Kingswinford which in any case was atypical.

There does, however, appear to have been a considerable undercurrent of resistance to the Cobdenite appeals

of trade union leaders among the unorganised and unemployed, and in most constituencies the margin of victory was narrow. With the exception of Sir Henry Fowler's 'duchy,' Wolverhampton East, the Liberal or Labour share of the vote ranged only between 56.2% and 50.8%.

The closest run contest was in Wolverhampton West where Fred Richards was returned by only 171 votes. It is impossible to state precisely to what extent the alliance with the Liberals affected the outcome, but in spite of the misgivings of Macdonald and the Labour Representation Committee executive it seems this could well have been the decisive factor in Richards' narrow victory. There is nothing to indicate any defections among Independent Labour Party voters, whose leaders had in any case been party to the negotiation of the alliance, and it is a fair assumption that the Liberal-Labour agreement won more middle class Liberal votes than it lost working class Conservative votes. Wolverhampton West was 'villadom' and contained a larger middle class element than other Black Country boroughs. In addition the bulk of Wolverhampton's organised workers lived in the West division and their commitment to free trade was secure.[61] Between these two factors there were relatively few Conservative working class voters in the constituency and there could not have been any large number of such votes lost to Richards.

The Conservative counter attack against Richards began almost at once. The Wolverhampton Conservative Association was reorganised and a new, younger candidate chosen to replace the ageing Hickman. This was A.F. Bird, head of the Birmingham custard powder concern, who had contested Wednesbury in 1906. He paid the salary and expenses of a full time agent, the rent and maintenance of the party headquarters and at the end of each year made up any deficiency in the association's accounts. From 1908 onwards the municipal elections were used to perfect the party organisation and so provide a springboard for the parliamentary campaign. This proved so effective that by the time of the general election in January 1910 the number of Labour councillors in Wolverhampton had been reduced from five in 1906 to only two.[62]

The Conservative Party also reacted strongly to the disaster of 1906 in other Black Country divisions. New candidates were adopted early in Dudley, Wednesbury and Walsall and immediately began vigorous cultivation of their constituencies. Their message was 'how utterly impossible it was for the present Free Trade system to adequately provide for the financial needs of the nation,'[63] and with much of Black Country industry still in the grip of depression an increasing number of working men were converted to tariff reform. The portents were clear as early as 1908 when there was a by-election in

Wolverhampton East consequent on Sir Henry Fowler's elevation to the peerage. The Liberal Unionist, Leopold Amery, opposed G.R. Thorne on a 'frankly protectionist' platform and was defeated by only eight votes where there had been a Liberal majority of 2,865 only two years earlier.[64]

Following the 'People's Budget' the Conservative attack on free trade was intensified. They freely alleged that 'the result of Free Trade was Socialistic Finance' and by the eve of the election of January 1910 this had been translated into the claim that 'every vote recorded has got to be either for Tariff Reform or for Socialism.'[65] The Tory strategy was well chosen. In an area where working men had little sympathy with socialism these charges further undermined belief in free trade and its advocates entered the election on the defensive.

In Wolverhampton West Fred Richards' difficulties were compounded by differences with his union colleagues and division within the local Labour Party. Less than a year after his election Richards was under attack from within the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives. To an active socialist minority, who were enraged by the refusal of the Parliamentary Labour Party to adopt a definite socialist programme and by the party's readiness to accomodate itself to the forms, conventions and rituals of the House of Commons, Richards came to

symbolise 'all the time-serving flunkeyism' they associated with this policy. Though this remained a minority view the minority supplied a disproportionately large proportion of branch officers and conference delegates, and their 'bitterly hostile' attitude to Richards did much to undermine his authority both within the union and in his constituency.[66]

The division within the Wolverhampton Labour Party arose over the strategy to be followed in the contest of municipal elections in face of the vigorous attack launched by the Conservatives. The trade unionists favoured fighting only a limited number of seats, those where there was a reasonable chance of success. The Independent Labour Party preferred to contest as many wards as possible. The outcome was usually an unsatisfactory compromise. Thus in 1908 when the Trades Council decided to contest only the two wards already held by Labour members, the Independent Labour Party at once resolved to contest the remaining ten. They were persuaded to reduce this number to two, but with the party having insufficient workers to contest four wards effectively all the Labour candidates were defeated.[67]

To add further to Richards' difficulties the local party was unable to raise sufficient funds to maintain a full time agent, his health was poor immediately before the election and his opponent conducted a particularly vigorous and unscrupulous campaign, possibly to the

extent of engaging in corrupt practices. In these circumstances his defeat was to be expected and he went down by 592 votes, but his personal standing in Wolverhampton West was such that he was one of only two free trade candidates in the Black Country boroughs to increase his vote over that of 1906. The other was A.G. Hooper in Dudley. Hooper retained his seat, as did G.R. Thorne in Wolverhampton East, but in the remaining four boroughs the combined appeal of retaining the union with Ireland and tariff reform to the 'traditional emotions' of working men was strong enough to return these to Conservative hands. The situation in the two county divisions was unchanged, with Kingswinford remaining Conservative and the Liberals retaining Worcestershire North.

Fred Richards' defeat in Wolverhampton brought his official connection with the town, and indeed his parliamentary career, to an end. In April 1910 Harry Roberts, secretary of the Wolverhampton Labour Representation Committee, informed E.L. Poulton, who had succeeded W.B. Hornidge as general secretary of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, of the following resolution which the committee had adopted at its March meeting:

> That inasmuch as it is hopeless to think of winning West Wolverhampton for Labour without a paid Registration Agent, and futile to attempt to do so without an Election Policy that will unite all sections of the Labour

> Party, this Labour Representation Committee resolves that Mr. Richards be invited to contest West Wolverhampton at the next election, subject to the following conditions: namely (1) That the Labour Association be dissolved and the Labour Representation Committee becomes the controlling committee for Parliamentary as well as Municipal purposes; (2) That the Boot and Shoe Operatives Union pay not less than 75 per cent of the salary of the paid Registration Agent and Organiser; (3) That any election be fought under jurisdiction of the Labour Representation Committee and on strictly independent lines.[68]

Poulton replied that he felt sure his executive council would 'desire to know a great many more particulars' before undertaking any commitment on the lines indicated by the resolution, and the council in fact decided to refer the whole matter to the national conference of the union. Before the conference took place a further complication arose when the executive council was approached by the East Northants Socialist and Labour Party about the possibility of Richards becoming their candidate at the next election. In the event, because of the Osborne Judgement, the conference refused to sanction Richards' candidature in either constituency, and at the general election of December 1910 he stood as an independent Labour candidate in East Northants, where he finished bottom of the poll in a three cornered fight.[69]

In Wolverhampton West attempts were made to find a candidate for the December election from among James Sexton of the Dock Labourers, T. Warner of the Bleachers' and Dyers' Union, W. Walker of the Carpenters' and Joiners' Union and G.H. Stuart of the Postmen's

Federation, but without success and A.F. Bird was opposed by the Liberal, L. Price.[70] Seven of the remaining eight Black Country divisions were contested on similar lines, with the sitting Conservative member being returned unopposed in the ninth, Kingswinford.

The election was fought on much the same issues as in January. The constitutional issue seems to have played little part, and the central questions were again tariff reform and the union with Ireland. This was reflected in the results, which showed little change from those of ten months earlier. The Conservatives obtained the small turnover of votes they needed to regain Dudley, where following his defeat in January Major Griffith-Boscawen had 'increased all the subscriptions which he had been giving previously,' and the Earl of Dudley's agent, Gilbert Claughton, 'threw himself personally into the conflict and brought great pressure to bear on foremen and others in the mines and works which occupy so important a place on the Dudley estate,' but this was the only seat to change hands in a quiet election.[71]

Despite their failure to find a candidate in December 1910 officials of the Labour Party in Wolverhampton were convinced that the West division of the borough remained potentially a Labour seat and a search began immediately to find a successor to Fred Richards. Eventually an approach was made to the

Railway Clerks' Association and in February 1912 the union's general secretary, Alexander Walkden, was formally adopted as prospective Labour candidate for Wolverhampton West.[72]

Walkden was a Londoner by birth and had been educated at Merchant Taylors' School. On leaving school he had joined the Great Northern Railway as a clerk and had taken an active part in the union's affairs from its foundation in 1897. He left the Great Northern Railway in 1906 to become general secretary of the union and within six years had built up its membership from 4,000 to 17,500, grouped in 180 branches. He was a 'strong advocate of the Labour party,' to which the Railway Clerks had affiliated in 1909, a free trader and a firm believer in women's suffrage.[73]

Shortly after Walkden's adoption, in May 1912, James Whittaker, a leading figure in the Trades Council and a former Wolverhampton councillor who had acted as Fred Richards' agent, was appointed as a full time agent and the Labour Party rented 'spacious offices' in Queen's Square. Whittaker's local knowledge and connections were an excellent complement to Walkden's administrative competence, speaking ability and personable manner and together the two began to build a strong party organisation. A labour newspaper, the Wolverhampton Worker, was brought out in 1912, and in

1913 the Railway Clerks' Association instituted a political fund to support Walkden. This brought a 'magnificent response,' over £700 being raised in the first year, and gave a 'great impetus' to Walkden's candidacy and the party generally in Wolverhampton.[74]

Developments elsewhere were less encouraging. The Lib-Lab tradition persisted among trade union leaders and in an insular and conservative area working men generally were reluctant to abandon their allegiance to the two great parties. Thus, in Wednesbury there was still no labour representative on the Town Council in 1914, while in Dudley the two working class councillors, John Taylor and William Bradford, belonged to the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party respectively.

Things were slightly better in Walsall, where a Labour Representation Committee had been formed in 1903, after a conference of 'all progressive parties' to discuss the question of labour representation in the town. In November 1905 the Labour Representation Committee invited the Walsall Trades Council, which had been reformed in 1890 after a lapse of some years, to discuss the question of amalgamation and in April 1906 the Walsall and District Trades and Labour Representation Council was formed. In the following August the rules were amended to allow the local branches of the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society to

to affiliate, and under the leadership of Joseph Deakin and Joseph Thickett the council began to move slowly and uncertainly towards independent labour representation.[75]

Deakin had returned to Walsall after completing the prison sentence imposed in 1892 for his part in the alleged bomb plot, and remained a central figure in the Labour Party in the town until his death in 1937. Thickett was a railway signalman. He had been a member of the executive council of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants in 1905 and was a gifted orator. He became the first Labour parliamentary candidate in Walsall in 1918 and the first Labour Party Mayor of the town in 1923. Under the combined influence of these two labour organisations in Walsall began to shake off Lib-Labism, and in 1912 the Walsall Labour Association was formed with the object of securing direct Labour representation on local government bodies, and the hope eventually 'to aspire to Parliamentary honours -----.'[76] In August 1913 Joseph Thickett became the first Labour member of Walsall Town Council and in 1914 he was joined by a second in Henry Hucker, his colleague in the signal box at Pleck.

Hucker's return to Walsall Town Council proved to be the last small achievement of the Labour Party in the Black Country before the outbreak of war brought partisan political activity temporarily to an end. At this time, after 14 years of uphill fighting, the Labour Party had

established only a very tenuous foothold in the Black Country, but the pioneering efforts of its early champions were amply rewarded at the first general election after the war. The slow pace of change in a socially conservative area was sharply accelerated by the catalytic effects of war, and there was a dramatic upsurge of support for the Labour Party at the general election of 1918. The party contested eight of the nine constituencies in the Black Country and in three of them its candidates were elected. After the doubts and uncertainties of its early years and the false dawn of 1906, the Labour Party emerged as a major political force in the Black Country.

Notes to Chapter Twelve on pages 537-541.

C H A P T E R T H I R T E E N

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS: THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT IN THE BLACK COUNTRY 1863-1914.

In 1914 the working class movement in the Black Country was weak and divided. Despite the overwhelmingly working class composition of the area its nine parliamentary divisions were represented in the House of Commons by seven Conservative and two Liberal MPs. There were only a handful of working men on local government bodies and some of these were representatives of the two great parties, and as such owed their first allegiance to those parties. In many industries there was still no effective basis of union organisation, and where organisation did exist union attitudes combined a strong element of insularity with extreme local particularism. The first of these characteristics inhibited the exercise of influence by national organisations, the second made for an unproductive dissipation of energies.

The observation made by H.A. Clegg, Alan Fox and A.F. Thompson about the lack of cohesiveness and solidarity in the national movement in 1910 could certainly be applied without qualification to the Black Country four years later.

> The unions could still appear selfish and callous ----- Every union, skilled and unskilled, fought for jobs and members, and little mercy was shown to the weaker

party. Each group pursued its own industrial objectives without thought for others and many political objectives were narrow and sectional. Considerable sections of both Conservative and Liberal opinion within the unions resented the alliance with the socialists and sometimes fought against it.[1]

Equally, it would be quite as mistaken to apply the conclusion derived from this analysis that it is 'therefore misleading to speak of a "labour movement" as a constant in the history of (the period 1889-1910),' to the Black Country as it is to reject the idea of a 'movement' on the national scale. Reluctance or refusal to accept the concept of a working class movement appears to derive from the proposition that 'a movement looks outside itself — to the good of society as well as its own betterment, and to a national following as well as its own membership.' Used in this sense the term movement imposes a requirement that before separate organisations can be accepted as having a larger unity there must be recognition of the primacy of objectives and ideals which transcend mere 'common interests and aims which they are prepared to pursue together.'[2]

This is a heavy obligation to place upon any social movement whatever its state of evolution, and one which was certainly beyond the comprehension of the working class movement in the circumstances of its existence before 1914. This was accepted by its early leaders who acknowledged that it was at this stage of

the movement's development a sufficient objective to seek to resolve the situation where political liberty co-existed with economic bondage. Thus it was argued by Ramsay Macdonald in 1909 that

> society in modern times includes a state of political liberty and economic bondage. The workman who has become politically free is still beset with all the economic pains and disabilities of a wage-earner --- Poverty is always at his door, uncertainty sits with him in his home. There is no regular demand for his labour; his income, as a rule, is insufficient to enable him to make adequate provision for his family, for times of slack work, for old age.[3]

At this time the essential purpose of the movement, Macdonald maintained, was to release wage earners from 'economic bondage;' the unity of its 'disparate and vague' constituent elements was adequately defined in terms of a shared 'sense of exclusion from communal life and politics'[4] and a common need 'to cut across the existing lines of partisanship in order to concentrate on working class demands.'[5]

In this more restricted and more realistic sense of the term it is certainly possible to discern the rise of a working class movement in the Black Country, even in the foreshortened perspective of the period from 1889. This was the year in which the formation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain precipitated long standing differences between Black Country miners' associations into an open conflict, making the 1890s

the most troubled decade in the turbulent history of mining trade unionism in the area. By 1914, though suspicions between rival associations clearly remained and hostility towards the national organisation still lingered in the central districts of the coalfield, there had also been important gains in cohesiveness among the local miners' organisations. There had been solid support for the Eight Hours Bill of 1908 and a united response to the Miners' Federation strike call in 1912. Among the previous generation of Black Country miners universal acknowledgement of the need to restrict output or recognition of the authority of a national association would have been quite inconceivable. It is true that there was a bitter clash between the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Association and the Old Hill Association in 1912 over the level at which the minimum wage should be pitched but this was essentially a disagreement about what the local industry could bear rather than about the minimum wage principle.

The former differences among Black Country miners about the relative merits of conflicting principles of wage determination had been resolved with the affiliation of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Association to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in 1899, and the replacement of the sliding scale and adjustment of wages on the principle of supply and demand by the principle of the living wage. The effect

of this concentration on working class demands in releasing miners from economic bondage can be clearly seen by a comparison of the relationship between coal prices and wages before and after the change. In 1889 a coal price of 5/6d per ton gave miners' wages of 3/8d per day (thick coal) and 2/11d per day (thin coal). In 1913 the same coal price gave wages of 4/4½d per day and 4/1½d per day.[6]

The ironworkers of the Black Country were slower to break with the established principles of wage determination than were the miners, and their wages remained governed by the sliding scale of the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board to 1914 and beyond. Reluctance to dispense with the traditional processes was due to the fact that during the last years before 1914, when the ideas of political economy, from which the traditional processes derived, were being roundly called in question by many groups of workers in the Black Country and elsewhere, these were working strongly in favour of the Black Country ironworkers. The coincidence, from about 1906 onwards, of recovery in the product market with continued contraction in the labour market produced a steady rise in wages such that by 1915 these reached the unprecedented level of 13/3d per puddled ton. As a result the great unrest of 1911-13 left the Black Country ironworkers completely untouched, but this does not mean that they were any less reluctant than other workers to

seek emancipation from economic bondage and to that extent less committed to the great forward surge of the labour movement which took place in these years, but simply that they realised that in the special circumstances of their industry working class demands could be better achieved through the established processes.

Among the metalworkers it is also possible to discern positive progress towards securing emancipation from economic bondage and the implementation of working class demands after 1889. It is true that throughout the twentieth century the structure of craft unionism generally was certainly in decline. Membership of the Midland Counties Trades Federation fell from a peak of almost 20,000 in 1900 to less than 5,000 in 1914, but taken in isolation this comparison is misleading. In 1914 two groups of workers, the large chainmakers and the galvanised hollow-ware workers were strongly organised independently of the Midland Counties Trades Federation, and many craft workers were members of one or other of the general unions which had been involved in the events of 1913. The narrowly economic gains consequent on the rise of the new unions were dramatic and immediate and, no less important, by reason of their membership of these unions. Black Country workers could begin to feel a sense of solidarity with workers in trades other than their own and with workers in other areas to a much greater extent than would have been

possible had they remained members of a narrowly sectional local organisation.

In addition, by 1914 the Chain Trade Board was well established and working satisfactorily, the Fire-Brick Wages and Conciliation Board was beginning operations and measures were in hand to include the hollow-ware workers within the protective framework of the Trade Boards Act of 1909. These achievements were small but important steps in the direction of workers gaining some control over their communal life, and while they were largely the result of independent action by separate groups they were motivated by a common awakening to the need to concentrate on working class demands.

Thus, even within the contrived perspective of 1889-1914 there is detectable in the Black Country some movement towards the goal of release from economic bondage and an increasing appreciation of the importance of emphasising working class demands. Progress was uneven and slow but there is discernible a growing awareness of the need to remedy the exclusion of the working class from communal life, and this was sufficiently widespread by the end of the period to justify the recognition of a movement having a wider identity than that of the sectional groups within it.

The vantage point of 1889 is described as contrived and foreshortened with reference to the Black Country because the events which marked that year as a major

landmark in labour history left this area almost completely untouched, and the date has been used simply for reasons of analytical tidiness. There are many more dates of much greater significance in the development of trades unionism in the Black Country. The impetus given to craft organisation by the formation of the Midland Counties Trades Federation makes 1886 a much more important year than 1889 as a turning point in the history of labour in the Black Country. Similarly in mining trade unionism the recognition of the local unions in 1874 and the affiliation of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Association to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, bringing to an end the long isolation of Black Country miners from successive national movements, were initially of more significance locally than the formation of the Federation itself. For the ironworkers of the Black Country 1872 and 1888 were both much more important dates than 1889. In 1872 conciliation machinery was first established in the finished iron trade of the area; in 1888 the formation of the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board placed this machinery on an institutional basis which has survived to the present time.

For both miners and ironworkers the establishment of lasting organisation in 1863 marks this as the most important year of all in the history of trades unionism in the Black Country in the period before 1914, and over

the longer perspective of 1863-1914 the progress of the working class movement in the area is clearly discernible, especially with reference to identification with the workers of other areas. This progress was halting and uncertain and remained far from complete after 50 years but nevertheless clear gains had been made by 1914.

These were most apparent in the case of the ironworkers. The 'savage independence' and extreme insularity of Black Country ironworkers which were at the root of the instability of local union organisation and its uneasy relations with other ironworking districts during the 1860s were modified by the experience of depression in the later 1870s and 1880s, enabling the Black Country men to be absorbed into the Associated Iron and Steel Workers of Great Britain in 1887. In due course, the further modification of attitudes consequent on the wider perspectives imposed by membership of a national association and the implications of a fragmented union structure for the fragile prosperity of their own industry enabled the next generation of Black Country ironworkers to accept the movement towards confederation easily, and the inclusion of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers within the Iron and Steel Trades Federation and its successor, BISAKTA, was achieved without opposition from them.

Among Black Country miners doubts about the value of involvement with miners in other areas were still

evident in 1914. Persistent suspicions of successive national movements dating from the time of the 1864 strike is a main theme in the history of mining trade unionism in the Black Country throughout the ensuing 50 years. A second main theme is the continuing hostility between local associations arising from differing industrial attitudes. Through the 1880s these themes merged until by 1890 local differences were defined in terms of membership of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. The interaction and mutual reinforcement of the two themes ensured the continuation of both to 1914 and later, but after the affiliation of the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Association to the Miners' Federation of Great Britain this was in a progressively muted form and over the whole period 1863-1914 clear advances are discernible in local solidarity and in cohesiveness with the national movement.

While there were important gains in the internal solidarity of particular groups of workers in pursuit of working class demands and a greater willingness to co-operate with the national organisations for their own industries there was little progress towards any form of co-operation between groups. The miners and ironworkers pursued their separate courses, and while both from time to time made token gestures of sympathy towards the nailers or small chainmakers or other

groups of craft workers these were never translated into positive action. This does not, however, destroy the idea of a local working class movement. The concept of a movement, national or local, carries with it an 'inherent pluralism' deriving from the 'long experience of industrialisation in a complex and highly localised society,' giving rise to 'different layers as well as different strands.'[7]

Equally, the halting progress of the Labour Party in the Black Country before 1914 is not a valid reason for denying the existence of a labour movement within the area. The Black Country was a particularly difficult area for the Labour Party to organise, in that the conditions from which the party took its rise were not present or developed only late in the period.

Thus, the contrast between the steady rise in the working class standard of living and the 'new atmosphere of disciplined intensity that descended over production' consequent on the acceleration of industrial change through the 1880s and 1890s, which heightened to a new urgency the old antagonism of trades unionism towards profit-motive capitalism and in doing so provided a main stimulus to the formation of a new trade union-based party,[8] was largely absent in the Black Country until the last few years before the war. The real wages of many Black Country workers stagnated or actually declined through the 1880s and into the 1890s, and the

vitiation of industrial change effectively precluded the widespread growth of a disciplined industrial system and the accompanying 'dehumanisation' of labour relations.

Similarly, a second important factor in elevating the working class to a higher plane of political consciousness, the uncompromisingly class conscious attitude of employers, conflicting directly with the tendencies of social development, was also largely absent in the Black Country. The attitude prevailing among employers 'in the great majority of trades' in most other industrial areas, that it was 'beneath their dignity voluntarily to confer with Trade Union leaders on equal terms' hardly existed. By the 1890s the normal process of wage adjustment in the two major Black Country industries was through sliding scales administered by conciliation boards. As a result capitalists and workers had become accustomed to meeting on an 'equal footing' andhad come 'to recognise each others representative capacity.'[9]

The peculiarities of the Black Country's industrial and social structure thus prevented or delayed the appearance of two of the main factors behind the mounting discontent of the working class in the 1880s and 1890s, and which was eventually channelled into the formation of the Labour Representation Committee. In addition the two great shocks to working class

consciousness which destroyed the legend of industrial self-sufficiency and translated discontent into overt action, the defeat of the A.S.E. in 1897-8 and the Taff Vale decision, had less impact in the Black Country than elsewhere. The A.S.E. had only a handful of members in south Staffordshire, and in an area of traditionally pacific industrial relations there seemed little likelihood that a trade union would place itself in a situation where it could be sued for a tortious act.

These unpropitious conditions for the growth of the Labour Party enabled the tradition of working class Liberalism among labour leaders to survive longer than in many other areas, and analysis of working class politics in terms of changing attitudes towards Liberalism is, therefore, particularly pertinent to the Black Country. The attempt of successive generations of working class leaders 'both to identify themselves with Liberalism and to disengage themselves from it'[10] can be clearly seen in the attitudes displayed towards Thomas Griffiths's candidacy for the West Bromwich School Board in 1877, and in the attempt to nominate Richard Juggins as the Liberal candidate for Dudley in 1891; and Juggins himself provides a leading example of 'the conflict between the desire to be assimilated and the urge to independence' which was continuously present within individuals as well as within movements.'[11]

It is also clear that among working class leaders in the Black Country 'those who believed in political independence rarely thought of that independence as involving a complete break with Liberal values.'[12] The continuing strength of their attachment to Liberalism was revealed by the events of 1903 in North Worcestershire and Wednesbury, and tacitly acknowledged in the strategy adopted by the Labour Representation Committee in Wolverhampton West in the approach to the election of 1906. Together with the enduring influence of the traditional emotions among the generality of working men this was a formidable obstacle to the growth of the Labour Party in the area.

Nevertheless, by 1914 the 'childlike confidence in the great Liberal Party' among trade union leaders, which had frustrated the growth of socialism in the 'Radical towns' of the midlands during the 1890s,[13] was beginning to break down and ordinary working men were also beginning to respond to the Labour Party. In Wolverhampton West the party was strongly organised and fully committed to independent labour representation, and the movement towards independence was also gaining impetus in Walsall. During the war years the basis of support for the Labour Party was both broadened and deepened as the pace of social change quickened and at the general election of 1918 the party was firmly established as the radical alternative to Conservatism

in the Black Country.

However, despite all the qualifications in terms of movement towards political independence, of developing awareness of the need to pursue working class demands or of progress towards solidarity with workers in other areas, the fact remains that by any test in 1914 the working class movement in the Black Country was still very weak. One result of this has been that the area has received little attention from labour historians, and we may conclude this study with a brief survey of the historiography of the labour movement in the Black Country.

In general works on the political history of the labour movement the Black Country is hardly mentioned. Despite their vast range none of the many books by G.D.H. Cole contains any sort of reference to the area and nor does The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900 by Henry Pelling. Likewise, the important work on the Labour Representation Committee by Philip Poirier, The Advent of the Labour Party, does not mention the area at all. The parallel book by Frank Bealey and Henry Pelling, Labour and Politics 1900-1906, deals briefly with the developments in Wolverhampton West prior to the 1906 election but draws a complete blank over the events of 1903 in Worcestershire North and Wednesbury. From an analytical standpoint these oversights are not crucial. The findings of this thesis do

not require any major re-thinking of conclusions about the decline of Liberalism or the rise of an independent Labour Party; on the contrary they tend to reinforce the received account of these developments. Nevertheless, the almost complete omission from general works of any account or analysis of events in a major centre of industry and population does amount to a serious gap in our knowledge and understanding, and this in itself provides sufficient justification for local and regional studies such as this thesis.

Similarly, the Black Country has not been well served by historians of trade unionism. The only references in the Webbs' History of Trade Unionism are buried in footnotes, and the more recent work by H.A. Clegg, Alan Fox and A.F. Thompson, A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889, Volume One does only slightly better, with one reference to the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board and two sentences on 'the tiny organisations affiliated to the Midland Counties Trades Federation.' In addition there are scattered references in studies of particular unions such as that by H.J. Fyrth and Henry Collins, The Foundry Workers, and Robin Page Arnot's three volume history of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. Volume Two of the Victoria Country History of Stafford includes some material on the development of unionism in the main Black Country industries, but with the notable exception of the

section on the mining industry by A.J. Taylor the treatment is eclectic and haphazard.

The only episode in the history of trades unionism in the Black Country which has received any sort of detailed attention is the great strike of 1913. This has been the subject of two accounts. The first of these was a colourful but not always accurate version by James Leask, O.B.E. and Philomena Bellars, '<u>Nor Shall the Sword Sleep -----</u>', and the second a more detached and precise account by Richard Hyman in a recent doctoral thesis, <u>The Workers' Union</u>, a shortened version of which was subsequently published under the same title. In their different ways both are good narrative accounts, but neither analyses the origins of the unrest which gave the strike its special intensity and neither examines the consequences of the strike in terms of its implications for trade unionism in the Black Country.

These oversights and omissions are understandable and excusable in general works and studies of particular trade unions, given their necessarily artificial perspectives and frames of reference. As Professor Hobsbawm correctly points out 'the basic unit of the labour historian is, after all, the industry of the region (town, locality) -----.'[14] We are, therefore, entitled to expect a much more ambitious level of analysis as well as a more detailed and comprehensive account of events in works of local history, but once

again we find that the working class of the Black Country has not been well served by its historians.

Before dealing with works wholly devoted to labour history we may first dispose of studies which have a different central theme, but which necessarily deal incidentally with aspects of working class history.

There is only one such study devoted to political organisation, this being the thesis by K.J. Dean, Parliamentary Elections and Party Organisation in Walsall 1906-1945 subsequently published by Walsall Corporation as Town and Westminster. This is a meticulous account of the development of party organisation, but it rarely penetrates below the level of narrative. Thus, while the frictions between the various elements within the local labour movement are duly noted there is little attempt to analyse either the causes or the consequences of these tensions. In addition the choice of 1906 as a starting point is an unfortunate one as far as the Labour Party is concerned in that it leaves untouched both the social and economic origins of the party in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and its vital first years between 1900 and 1906. A detailed account of the events of these years in a single town especially if related to the wider regional and national context could be a valuable exercise. Nevertheless, Dean's work is a useful study, detailed and largely accurate on points of fact and particularly

welcome as a first venture into the almost completely neglected political history of the Black Country.

The economic and social history of the area has been more fully covered. The first major work in this field was the thesis by Alan Fox, Industrial Relations in Birmingham and the Black Country 1860-1914. This was a valuable pioneering study, establishing the main outlines of the development of trades unionism among the miners and ironworkers and offering some valuable insights into local conditions. Much of Fox's analysis, however, is extremely facile and the thesis is seriously deficient in detail.

The superficial nature of his analysis of the difference in militancy between miners' unions in the two sectors of the Black Country was revealed in Chapter Four above. Similarly, to take only one further example, Fox's account of the local circumstances attending the miners' lock out of 1893 is also glaringly inadequate. The inadequacy may be demonstrated simply by quoting the four sentences in which he deals with the episode.

> The Miners' Federation of Great Britain men had received, since 1888, advances on wage rates totalling 40%. In July 1893, employers of the Federation districts proposed a 10% wage reduction, which the Miners' Federation of Great Britain decided to resist. Although wage rates in the Black Country had also showed, over the same period, corresponding increases totalling 40% —— awarded under the sliding scale, after periodical ascertainments called for by the men —— an audit demanded by the employers at this juncture resulted in no change. While all the Federation districts,

> including the immediately adjoining ones of Pelsall and Old Hill came out on strike, the Black Country men connected with the Wages Board remained at work.[15]

The analytical weakness of Fox's work is compounded by its lack of detail. Thus, his account of the tensions between the Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain and John Kane's National Association of Ironworkers in the 1860s is compressed into a single sentence: 'Much irked by the refusal of Hobson's men to amalgamate, Kane moved his headquarters from Gateshead to Walsall in 1867 in an unsuccessful effort to capture the Black Country men.' In the same way his account of the difficulties and frictions surrounding the formation of the Associated Iron and Steel Workers of Great Britain and the re-organisation of the South Staffordshire Mill and Forge Wages Board into the Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board in 1887 and 1888 extends to only three paragraphs.[16] As a result the significance of these episodes for the development of trade unionism and for the conduct of industrial relations is largely lost.

By contrast with Fox's sins of omission the weakness of J.A.C. Baker's work is rooted in sins of commission. The three chapters in his thesis, History of the Nut and Bolt Trade in the West Midlands, which are devoted to labour organisation are littered with major mistakes of basic fact. It would be tedious in the extreme to list them all and a few prime examples must suffice to make the point. Thus, the account of the inaugural meeting

of the Nut and Bolt Forgers' Protection Society in 1870 is quite incorrect, as is the statement that Richard Juggins 'was there and then appointed full time secretary.' The Midland Counties Trades Federation was not founded between 1872 and 1874, and nor was Juggins 'forced by illhealth to withdraw' as the prospective Liberal candidate for Dudley before the general election of 1892.[17]

The superficial nature of Baker's research is further revealed by his reluctance to commit himself to detail and by the almost complete absence of any reference to sources. His account of developments in trade unionism and industrial relations contains altogether only eight references; three of these are to secondary works and a further two are cross references. These are serious shortcomings and Baker's thesis should be used with caution. It provides at best only an approximate guide to the history of trade unionism in the nut and bolt industry.

This brings us finally to those studies wholly devoted to working class history. To date there have been three such full length works, namely the thesis by Eric Hopkins, The Working Classes of Stourbridge and District 1815-1914, and two theses by G.J. Barnsby, The Working Class Movement in the Black Country 1815-1867 and Social Conditions in the Black Country in the Nineteenth Century.

Dr. Hopkins's study is a comprehensive survey of

all aspects of working class social and economic life in a single town and its immediate surrounding district. The section that is most germane to this work, on self-help, can only be described as disappointingly superficial, both in its basic research and its analytical content. The thinness of Dr. Hopkins's research is revealed in a number of glaring blunders on matters of elementary fact. Thus, following Fox, he dates the foundation of the Old Hill Miners' Association in 1883. He goes on to compound the error by asserting that 'it is impossible to identify the local (miners') organisation' before this time, and then follows this quite remarkable and wholly inaccurate statement:

> The iron manufacturing industry had only small numbers of union men (in the late 1870s) and membership was, in any case, confined to master puddlers and master rollers, underhands not being admitted. Similarly, butties in the mines might be members of a union, but not the men in their teams.[18]

Similarly, Dr. Hopkins's analytical insight into local trades unionism is extremely shallow. For example, he glimpses the tensions and frictions between the Old Hill Miners' Association and the South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Wages Board but merely comments that 'the secretary of the Old Hill Miners' Association, B. Winwood, constantly attacked the sliding scale which was at the basis of the award scheme.'[19] No attempt is made to examine relations between the Old Hill

Association and the wages board men in the Stourbridge district. This area was certainly on the frontiers of influence between the two groups, with the Old Hill Association organising in Lye, to the east of Stourbridge and the northern part of Stourbridge being a natural recruiting ground for the Brierley Hill Miners' Association and hence subject to the influence of the wages board.

In the same way, Dr. Hopkins's account of the growth of trade unionism in the galvanised ironplate trade does not penetrate beyond a superficial level. There is no analysis of the industrial context, no comparison with the tinplate trade and no attempt to relate local developments to the rise of national organisation. Worst of all there is no reference to the part played by Simeon Webb in building organisation among the ironplate workers.[20] Personalities were vitally important in the growth of trades unionism in the Black Country, where industry was highly localised and the commitment to collectivism generally was weak. Very often the presence of a strong leader such as Webb, Tom Sitch or Richard Juggins was the most important factor in creating or preserving the fabric of union organisation in the local trades and any account of the development of trades unionism in the Black Country which overlooks this is, by reason of this omission alone, quite inadequate. Altogether, the jejune analytical content of Dr. Hopkins's

account, and its insecure grounding in fact, make it very thin gruel indeed.

Last of all in this survey we come to the work of G.J. Barnsby. In addition to the two theses cited above Dr. Barnsby has also written a number of articles and pamphlets on a variety of subjects within the field of labour history, ranging from The Origins of the Wolverhampton Trades Council to Dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie: Social Control in the Nineteenth Century Black Country. There is much to admire in Dr. Barnsby's writing. Its range and vigour are highly commendable and it amounts, in total, to a sizeable corpus of information on the history of labour in the Black Country. It must also be said, however, that much of his interpretation is completely wrong-headed and in consequence his account of working class activity and attitudes is dangerously misleading in many places.

The weakness of Dr. Barnsby's analysis lies essentially in its partiality, which derives from the requirement of his political creed, that it is the first duty of all workers to fight against the capitalist system. The corollary of this is that any working class activity or organisation is seized on and reported as a manifestation of militancy, and therefore, by inference, making some small contribution to the disruption of bourgeois society, or more hopefully, the overthrow of capitalism. These may or may not be desirable objectives,

but they were certainly not among the aims of the working class movement in the Black Country in the second half of the nineteenth century.

To make the point we may concentrate here on Dr. Barnsby's doctoral thesis, Social Conditions in the Black Country in the Nineteenth Century, as the most comprehensive of his works, and in particular on the chapter on the miners, as the area of greatest overlap with the present work. Thus, we are told that 'the revolt against Alexander Macdonald's leadership of the Miners National Association was spearheaded by Black Country leaders and the Practical Miners Association which took over the M.N.A. was officered almost exclusively by Black Country and Shropshire leaders headed by Thomas Kimberley, the president.'[21] What we are not told is that the Practical Miners' Association collapsed within two years and that the militancy of the Black Country miners did not extend to making any financial contribution to it. Nor are we told that nothing is subsequently heard of Thomas Kimberley, and that another of the Practical Miners' leaders, Thomas Griffiths, thereafter became a leading advocate of sliding scales and conciliation.

Similarly, the formation of an 'Engine Drivers' Union of South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire in 1863 'is noted, and it is pointed out that in April 1864 a conference was held with two Black Country delegates

at which a national union was formed having five districts and 1,575 members. The enginemen were now in a position (to) exert pressure with regard to winding accidents,' — but no indication is given of the form which this pressure took, or of what success it brought.[22]

Again, we are told that 'as a result of the (1884) strike' the Social Democratic Federation set up branches in the area and Justice circulated among the miners, and left to infer that this was the beginning of a socialist boom in the Black Country.[23] We are not told that no branches survived for any length of time, or that socialism was received with attitudes ranging from suspicion to hostility by the great majority of miners and other working men.

Finally, even the establishment of the sliding scale in 1874 is presented as being 'in a fundamental sense a victory since it imposed principled industrial negotiations on employers who resisted to the last any obligation to deal with their employees as an organised body.'[24] Dr. Barnsby overlooks the point that it only imposed principled industrial negotiations for as long as the employers chose to accept them. Following the collapse of the first wages board and the strike of 1884 the employers refused to negotiate for four years. During that time miners' wages remained unchanged while coal prices rose by up to 10%.

These are only a few examples taken from a small

section of Dr. Barnsby's writings, but they are fully representative of his work. In a recent review of one of Dr. Barnsby's monographs, A History of Eduction in Wolverhampton 1800-1972, J.S. Hurt remarks that there are 'references to such issues as the Chartist schools in Bilston and Wednesbury, the pressures exerted by trade unions and other working class organisations ----,' and in doing so makes the point neatly, although inadvertently.[25] Dr. Barnsby's work is full of references and allusions, but his partial vision precludes full investigation of their implications. The result is excellent propaganda but poor history. R.H. Tawney's criterion of scholarship is particularly appropriate to a subject which is as complex and highly charged with emotion as labour history, and one which all of us engaged in this field of research must keep constantly in mind.

> If a man wants to do serious scientific work in any sphere, he must become impersonal, suppress his own fancies and predilections, and try to listen to reason speaking in him ---- We require to (a) be taught the infinite difference between what is false and what is true; (b) think of knowledge, like religion, as transcending all differences of class and wealth; and that in the eye of learning, as in the eye of God, all men are equal, because all are infinitely small.[26]

This critical survey of existing work on the history of labour in the Black Country is not meant to pre-empt criticism of this study. It has no claims to finality

and plenty of scope remains for further revision and new investigation of the themes discussed. There are also many areas of inquiry which remain almost completely untouched. Little or no work as yet has been done on such important topics as friendly societies, workmen's clubs, trades councils and working class education. Only when such studies have been carried out and the received account subjected to further refinement can we really begin to discern the full picture of working class life in the Black Country.

Notes to Chapter Thirteen on pages 542-544

N O T E S

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

pages 1-10

1. J.B. Jukes, Memoirs of the Geological Survey of Great Britain, Pt. II The iron ores of Staffordshire (1858).

2. E. Burritt, Walks in the Black Country and its Green Borderland (1868) p.344.

3. Report of the Land Utilisation Survey (1947), Appendix II p. 639.

4. B.L.C. Johnson & M.J. Wise, The Black Country 1800-1950 in Birmingham and its Regional Setting (1951) p. 246.

5. W. Hawkes Smith, Birmingham and its Vicinity (1836) p. 14-15.

6. B.L.C. Johnson & M.J. Wise, op cit p.248.

7. C. Hadfield, Canals of the West Midlands (1966) p. 79, 260.

8. J.B. Jukes, op cit.

9. G.C. Allen, The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country 1860-1927 (1929 reprinted 1966) p. 84.

10. S. Timmins (ed), Birmingham and Midland Hardware District (1866) p. 29.

11. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 86-7.

12. Production figures from Appendix to Report of the Select Committee on Coal 1873 p. 324-5. Unfortunately these figures do not separate production of the Black Country mines from that of south Staffordshire as a whole and it is not possible to indicate the proportion of total output which could be assigned to the Cannock section of the coalfield, north of the Bentley fault. Allen, (op cit p. 86) states that this 'was certainly not large at this time.'

13. B.L.C. Johnson & M.J. Wise, op cit p.241-2; G.C. Allen, op cit p. 278-9.

notes to pages 11-18

14. G. C. Allen, op cit p. 279-80.

15. ibid, p. 87, 280.

16. T.E. Lones, A History of Mining in the Black Country (1898) p. 90, 131;
G.C. Allen, op cit p. 289.

17. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 280.

18. op. cit p. 3.

19. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 89.

20. BPP Mining and Mineral Statistics of the United Kingdom for 1886 (C-5132 1887) p. 62;
British Association Handbook for Birmingham 1913 p. 417.

21. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 281.

22. Annual Statistical Report of the British Iron Trade Association 1894, p. 16.

23. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 89.

24. F.W. Hackwood, Wednesbury Workshops (n-d) p. 119.

25. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 283, 243.

26. ibid, p. 283-4.

27. ibid, p. 284.

28. ibid, p. 285-6.

29. BPP Report of the Labour Correspondent of the Board of Trade as to the condition of Nail Makers and Small Chain Makers in South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire 1888. p. 4.

30. Reports of the Inspectors of Factories, April 1875. p. 76.

31. E. Burritt, op cit; p. 211;
Victoria County History of Stafford Vol. 2. (1967) p. 253.

32. J.T. Jeffcock, Wolverhampton Guide (1884) p. 100.

33. BPP Board of Trade Enquiry into Cost of Living of the Working Classes in the United Kingdom 1908 (Cd. 3864) p. 487.

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34. J.A.C. Baker, History of the Nut and Bolt Industry in the West Midlands (Birmingham M. Com. 1965) p. 30.

35. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 253.

36. ibid, p. 221 & 270-1.

37. ibid, p. 298.

38. ibid, p. 298-9.

39. ibid, p. 299.

40. ibid, p. 300.

41. ibid, p. 302.

42. ibid, p. 305-6.

43. ibid, p. 310-311.

44. ibid, p. 307-8.

45. ibid, p. 309.

46. H.J. Mackinder, Britain and the British Seas (1915) p. 265.

47. S.B. Saul, The Myth of the Great Depression 1873-96, (1969) p. 53-55.

48. G.J. Barnsby, The Standard of Living in the Black Country during the Nineteenth Century in Economic History Review (Second Series) Vol. XXIV No. 2 May 1971. p. 236-7.

49. ibid, p. 223-4, 238-9.

50. ibid, p. 234-5.

51. ibid, p. 225-6, 238.

52. ibid, p. 228-233.

53. BPP Report on Mining Districts 1850 (1248) Vol. XXIII p. 26 & 31; Labour Tribune 19 March 1887.

54. E. Burritt, op cit p. 234-5; Sunday Chronicle 9 October 1909.

notes to pages 31-37

55. E. Hopkins, The Working Classes of Stourbridge and District 1815-1914, (London Ph.D 1972) p. 100

56. ibid, p. 128.

57. Victoria County History of Stafford Vol.Two, p. 88. The national figures were 53% and 56% respectively.

58. G.J. Barnsby, op cit p. 232.

59. Anon, Down in Dingyshire: Sketches of Life in the Black Country. (1873) p. 6-7.

60. Victoria County History of Stafford Vol. 3 (1970) p. 129-33.

61. J. Lawson, A Man's Life (new edition 1949) p. 69-70;
K.S. Inglis, Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England (1963) p. 329.

62. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 211-2.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

pages 39-46

1. BPP Children's Employment Commission (1892) Third Report p. 2.

2. A. Fox, Industrial Relations in Birmingham and the Black Country 1860-1914 (Oxford B. Litt 1952) p. 115-6. For an alternative view of the organisation of production in the finished iron industry see N.P. Howard, The Strikes and Lockouts in the Iron Industry and the Formation of the Ironworkers' Unions 1862-1869 in International Review of Social History Volume XVIII Part 3 1973 p. 398-400.

3. A. Fox, op cit p. 117.

4. A. Fox, op cit p. 128.

5. BPP Fifth Report on Trades Unions 1867-8 (3980 - I) Evidence of William Garner Q 9146.

6. ibid., Evidence of William Hobson Q 8947-52.

7. ibid., Evidence of Walter Williams Q 9839-44.

8. A. Fox, op cit p. 127.

9. BPP Fifth Report on Trades Unions 1867-8 (3980 - I) Evidence of Frederick Smith Q 10480-7.

10. ibid., Evidence of John Jones Q 9715-50.

11. ibid., Evidence of William Hobson Q 8931-2. The name Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain was, in fact, only adopted some time after the union's formation but it will be used throughout.

12. ibid., Written statement submitted by John Jones. At p. 55 in original, at p. 73 in Industrial Relations 9 of Irish University Press Series of British Parliamentary Papers. It is difficult to establish with certainty what part, if any, the National Association of Ironworkers played in establishing the Associated Ironworkers union. John Kane claimed (Fifth Report on Trades Unions 1867-8 (3980-I) (Q 11325) that the south Staffordshire union was formed with the 'advice and help' of the northern union, but this statement was never corroborated by any of the ironworkers' leaders in the Black Country, either at the time it was made or later.

notes to pages 47-54

13. ibid, Evidence of Frederick Smith Q 10419-29 and written statement of John Jones.

14. Rule 16 of the Wednesbury branch. Rule Book in Glamorgan Record Office, Cardiff, Ref. D/DG Section C Box 5.

15. BPP Fifth Report on Trades Unions 1867-8 (3980-I) Evidence of William Garner Q 9025-9065.

16. ibid, Evidence of William Hobson Q 8762.

17. ibid, Evidence of Frederick Smith Q 10461 and written statement of John Jones.

18. ibid, Evidence of John Kane Q 8549-77 and William Roden Q 10565.

19. Stephen Coltham, George Potter and the Bee-Hive Newspaper (Oxford D.Phil 1956) p. 119-125. I am grateful to Dr. Coltham for lending me the relevant section of his thesis.

20. BPP Fifth Report on Trades Unions 1867-8 (3980-I) Written statement of John Jones, p. 55 in original, p. 73 in IUP Series.

21. ibid, Evidence of John Kane Q 11325.

22. ibid, Evidence of William Hobson Q 8880 and 8904.

23. This account of the break-up of the Associated Ironworkers Union is based on the Ironworkers Journal of February 1869. 'Two sixpences' refers to the two wage advances secured in August and September 1863, which raised puddling rates to 1/- per ton above the customary rate of level shillings to pounds. For a complementary account of the events discussed in this section see N.P. Howard, op cit.

24. BPP Fifth Report on Trades Unions 1867-8 (3980-I) Evidence of John Kane Q 8220.

25. ibid, Evidence of John Kane Q 8224-26.

26. Ironworkers Journal March 1869, letter from James Capper.

27. Wolverhampton Chronicle 8 September 1869; Ironworkers Journal 1 & 15 September 1869.

28. Wolverhampton Chronicle 3 November 1869.

29. Birmingham Weekly Post 30 October 1869, quoted by A. Fox, op cit p. 144.

30. ibid.

31. Wolverhampton Chronicle 10 November 1869.

32. Ironworkers Journal August 1870;
The Engineer, 24 July 1870;
Wolverhampton Chronicle 24 & 31 August, 7, 14 & 21 September, 12 October 1870.

33. Ironworkers Journal 1 September 1871;
Wolverhampton Chronicle 23 & 30 August 1871.

34. Wolverhampton Chronicle 13 & 27 September, 4 October 1871.

35. J.C. Carr & W. Taplin, History of the British Steel Industry (1962) p. 69;
Wolverhampton Chronicle 23 August 1871.

36. Wolverhampton Chronicle 4 October 1871;
Ironworkers Journal 15 October 1871.

37. Ironworkers Journal 1 February 1872.

38. ibid.

39. ibid, 15 February 1872.

40. ibid, 1 July 1872.

41. ibid, 15 May 1872.

42. ibid, 1 June 1872.

43. Dudley Herald, 14 September 1872;
Ironworkers Journal, 1 July 1872.

44. Ironworkers Journal, 15 December 1872.

45. Wolverhampton Chronicle, 19 & 26 March 1873;
Ironworkers Journal, 1 April 1873.

46. Wolverhampton Chronicle 9 April 1873;
Dudley Herald 12 April 1873;
Ironworkers Journal 15 April & 1 May 1873.

47. A. Fox, op cit p. 156; Ironworkers Journal 15 November 1872.

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48. Wolverhampton Chronicle 1, 8 & 15 October 1873; Ironworkers Journal 15 November 1873.

49. Wolverhampton Chronicle 15 October 1873.

50. Ironworkers Journal 15 March & 1 April 1874. 'Extras' were certain practices of the iron trade which only applied in the north of England. Examples included the payment of compensation if puddlers were unable to work their full six heats per day due to the quality of the iron or the coal, and the employment by the owner of a man to take the puddled iron to the hammer thus saving the puddlers time.

51. Wolverhampton Chronicle 15 & 22 April 1874.

52. Ironworkers Journal 1 March, 1 September 1875; Wolverhampton Chronicle 24 February 1875.

53. Ironworkers Journal 15 November 1874, 1 February & 1 June 1875.

54. Wolverhampton Chronicle 23 & 30 June, 4 & 25 August, 1 September 1875; Ironworkers Journal 15 September 1875.

55. Wolverhampton Chronicle 6 October, 1 & 29 December 1875; West Bromwich Free Press 4 December 1875.

56. Wolverhampton Chronicle 26 January 1876; Ironworkers Journal 1 February 1876.

57. Ironworkers Journal 1 April 1876.

58. Wolverhampton Chronicle 15 March 1876; Ironworkers Journal 1 May 1876.

59. Radical Times 6 January 1876.

60. Wolverhampton Chronicle 15 & 22 March 1876.

61. Wolverhampton Chronicle 29 March & 5 April 1876; Ironworkers Journal 1 & 15 May 1876.

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pages 73- 79

1. Wolverhampton Chronicle 12 April & 15 May 1876; Ironworkers Journal 15 May 1876.

2. Ironworkers Journal 1 November 1876.

3. ibid, 1 March 1877.

4. BPP Royal Commission on Labour 1892 Group A Volume II (C6795-IV), Evidence of William Aucott Q 15616.

5. Ironworkers Journal 15 August 1875.

6. This finding accords with that of the Webbs, that by the late 1870s membership of the Amalgamated Ironworkers was 'confined to a few centres in the North of England.' (The History of Trade Unionism, (1907 edition p.335). It differs from Alan Fox's conclusion that the 'nucleus (of organisation among Black Country ironworkers) never completely disappeared.' (op cit p. 168). Significantly Fox makes no reference to the developments involving Capper and Aucott.

7. Ironworkers Journal 1 November 1878.

8. Factory Inspector's Report, half year ending 31 October 1873; report of Sub-Inspector Blenkinsopp.

9. Wolverhampton Chronicle 23 January 1878.

10. West Bromwich Free Press 12 & 26 July 1879.

11. Wolverhampton Chronicle 27 November 1878 & 29 January 1879; Ironworkers Journal 1 May 1880.

12. A. Fox, op cit p. 167.

13. Ironworkers Journal 1 December 1879 & 1 February 1880; Dudley Herald 10 January 1880.

14. Ironworkers Journal 1 May & 1 July 1880; Dudley Herald 19 June 1880.

15. Ironworkers Journal 1 August & 1 November 1880, 1 February, 1 August & 1 November 1881.

16. Ironworkers Journal March 1882.

17. Dudley Herald 14 January, 8 April & 14 November 1882; Ironworkers Journal March & December 1882, February & March 1883; Wolverhampton Chronicle 14 February 1883.

18. Wolverhampton Chronicle 6 June, 4, 11 & 18 July, 1 & 8 August 1883; Midland Advertiser, 7, 14 & 21 July 1883; County Advertiser for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 7, 14 & 21 July 1883.

19. Ironworkers Journal September & October 1883; Wolverhampton Chronicle 14 November 1883.

20. S. & B. Webb, The History of Trade Unionism (1907 edition) p. 351; Ironworkers Journal 1 January & 1 June 1881; Wolverhampton Chronicle 16 & 23 February, 18 May 1881.

21. Wolverhampton Chronicle 22 March, 5 April & 3 May 1882.

22. Dudley Herald 19 April, 3 & 17 May 1882.

23. Preamble to Rules of the South Staffordshire & East Worcestershire Millmen's Association 1884. Original rule book held at offices of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, Swinton House, Gray's Inn Road, London, reprinted in Man & Metal Vol. 49 No 10 October 1972.

24. Wolverhampton Chronicle 18 February 1885.

25. ibid, 16 December 1885; Dudley Herald 23 January 1886; Ironworkers Journal January 1886.

26. Wolverhampton Chronicle 13 April 1887.

27. J.C. Carr & W. Taplin, op cit p. 138-9.

28. Ironworkers Journal March 1887.

29. ibid, May 1887.

30. ibid, June 1887.

31. ibid.

32. ibid, September 1887.

33. ibid; County Advertiser for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 20 August 1887.

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34. Wolverhampton Chronicle 28 September, 2 November, 14 & 21 December 1887.

35. Royal Commission on Labour 1892 Group A Volume II (C6795-IV). Evidence of Benjamin Hingley Q 15486-92, William Aucott Q 15617; Labour Tribune 31 December 1887 & 7 January 1888.

36. Labour Tribune 28 January & 3 March 1888; Wolverhampton Chronicle 25 January & 29 February 1888.

37. Labour Tribune 9 & 23 June 1888; Ironworkers Journal July 1888.

38. Labour Tribune 7 July 1888; Ironworkers Journal July 1888.

39. Ironworkers Journal July 1888.

40. Labour Tribune 7 July 1888.

41. Ironworkers Journal November 1888.

42. Labour Tribune 1 & 15 December 1888.

43. Ironworkers Journal January 1889.

44. ibid, February, July, August & November 1889.

45. ibid, December 1889 & April 1890.

46. ibid, June & July 1890.

47. ibid, August 1890.

48. See Ironworkers Journal for period January-September 1892, but especially April.

49. Letter from James Cox to Beatrice Potter 26 October 1891. British Library of Political and Economic Science; Webb Trade Union Collection Section A Vol. XXIII.

50. Letter from Edward Trow to Beatrice Potter 28 December 1893, Webb Trade Union Collection Section A Vol. XXIII.

51. Ironworkers Journal May, August & October 1891; Royal Commission on Labour 1892 Group A Volume II (C6795-IV) Appendix 28.

52. Ironworkers Journal November 1899, January & July 1900.

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53. Wolverhampton Chronicle 5 & 19 April, 17 May 1893; Ironworkers Journal May, June & July 1893.

54. Ironworkers Journal July & September 1893. The changes were confirmed by the Board on 26 February 1894. See Dudley Herald 3 March 1894.

55. Ironworkers Journal September 1893.

56. Letter from James Cox to F.W. Galton 28 November 1895. Webb Trade Union Collection Section A Vol. XXIII.

57. Ironworkers Journal June 1897.

58. British Steel Smelters Association Monthly Report June 1889; J.C. Carr & W. Taplin, op cit p. 147.

59. British Steel Smelters Association Monthly Report December 1894, January & September 1895.

60. ibid, April & December 1900.

61. Ironworkers Journal January 1901.

62. ibid, April 1900.

63. J.H. Porter, Management, Competition & Industrial Relations - The Midlands Manufactured Iron Trade 1873-1914 in Business History Volume IX No. 1 January 1969 p. 45.

64. Ironworkers Journal August 1902; Wolverhampton Chronicle 23 July 1902; Stourbridge County Express 26 July 1902.

65. Ironworkers Journal August, September, October & November 1904.

66. ibid, January 1905

67. ibid, May & June 1905; BPP Board of Trade Report on Rules of Voluntary Conciliation & Arbitration Boards & Joint Committees 1907. (Cd. 3788) p. 112-117. The full text of these rules is reproduced as Appendix One, on p. 545-554.

68. Ironworkers Journal February 1905.

69. ibid, June & August 1906.

70. ibid, March 1913.

71. ibid, April 1907 & April 1908.

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72. J.C. Carr & W. Taplin, op cit p. 279.

73. The course of this dispute can be traced through the Ironworkers Journal and the Monthly Reports of the British Steel Smelters Association December 1909 to January 1911. For a summary account see J.C. Carr & W. Taplin, op cit p. 283-4.

74. British Steel Smelters Association Monthly Report December 1910.

75. Ironworkers Journal June & October 1911, November 1912.

76. County Herald for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 1 February 1913.

77. J.C. Carr & W. Taplin, op cit p. 285.

78. ibid, p. 287-8.

79. Ironworkers Journal October & November 1916.

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pages 117-127

1. G.C. Allen, op cit, p. 88.

2. BPP Reports on Mining Districts 1857-58 (2424) Vol. XXXII p. 34 and 1859 (2566) Vol. XII p. 48-51.

3. Report of the Committee on Trades Societies and Strikes (Social Science Association 1860) p. 301-2.

4. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 142-3.

5. A.J. Taylor, The Sub-contract System in the British Coal Industry in L.S. Pressnell (ed) Studies in the Industrial Revolution (1960) p. 217

6. ibid.

7. BPP Report on Mining Districts 1850 (1248) Vol. XXIII p. 10-11.

8. BPP Report of Midland Mining Commission 1843 (508) Vol. XIII p. XXXiii.

9. ibid, p. xxvii; T. Smith, Miners Guide (1846) p. 35-48; T.E. Lones, op cit p. 54-5; BPP Miners Eight Hour Day Committee 1907 Final Report (Cd 3426) Evidence of H.W. Hughes Q 11416-11464.

10. BPP Report of the Midland Mining Commission 1843 (508) Vol. XIII p. xxvii and p. 19, 35 & 42; T. Smith, op cit p. 64-68; T.E. Lones, op cit p. 60-61.

11. BPP Report of the Midland Mining Commission 1843 (508) Vol. XIII p. lii-liii and p. 25, 35, 41, 44, 56, 68, 70, 87.

12. ibid, p. xxiv-xl and p. 5, 13, 28, 31, 42-3, 82-5. The Black Country miners' term for these periods of unpaid work was 'bildus' or 'buildas,' which is a corruption of 'build houses.' Many butties were men of some wealth, which they frequently invested in property and the miners swore that a main factor in enabling them to 'build houses' was the unpaid work they were able to extract from the miners.

13. A. Fox, op cit p. 25-6.

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14. A.J. Taylor, op cit p. 219.

15. BPP Fifth Report on Trades Unions 1867-8 (3980-I) Evidence of Frederick Smith Q 10432.

16. Wolverhampton Chronicle 2 September 1863.

17. Unless otherwise stated all wage rates given are those of thick coal miners. All figures for prices and wages from 1864 are taken from A Record of Coal Prices and Miners' Wages in South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire compiled in 1909 by Thomas Mansell and extended to 1916 by John Richards and H. Whitehouse. An abstract of this record is given in Appendix Two p. 555-58.

18. Wolverhampton Chronicle 26 August 1863.

19. Miner and Workman's Advocate 14 & 21 November 1863.

20. ibid, 14 May 1864.

21. Wolverhampton Chronicle 13 July 1864.

22. Wolverhampton Chronicle 31 August 1864.

23. ibid, 7 September 1864.

24. ibid, 5, 12 & 19 October 1864.

25. See, for example, Miner & Workman's Advocate 27 August 1864. For an analysis of the antagonism between Towers and Macdonald see Stephen Coltham, From British Miner to Commonwealth: A Working Class Newspaper of the 1860s (unpub. typescript).

26. Miner & Workman's Advocate 19 November 1864.

27. ibid, 7 January 1865.

28. Beehive 17 June 1865; Miner & Workman's Advocate 17 June 1865.

29. Miner & Workman's Advocate 10 June 1865.

30. Beehive 3 June 1865.

31. Miner & Workman's Advocate 12 August 1865. I am grateful to Dr. Stephen Coltham for the loan of photocopies of the pages of the Miner & Workman's Advocate and Beehive referred to in notes 19-20 and 25-31, and for the loan of a draft of his paper, From British Miner to Commonwealth.

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32. Wolverhampton Chronicle 8 September & 17 November 1869; Dudley Herald 15 January 1870.

33. Dudley Herald 29 July & 12 August 1871.

34. Wolverhampton Chronicle 13 December 1871; Walsall Observer 7 June 1873.

35. Wolverhampton Chronicle 13 December 1871.

36. Dudley Herald 11 & 25 November 1871.

37. Dudley Herald 16 December 1871; Wolverhampton Chronicle 13 & 27 December 1871.

38. Dudley Herald 20 January 1872.

39. Dudley Herald 3 February 1872; Wolverhampton Chronicle 7 February 1872.

40. Dudley Herald 22 June 1872; Wolverhampton Chronicle 19 June 1872.

41. BPP Select Committee on the Scarcity and Dearness of Coal 1873: Evidence of Thomas Griffiths Q 5944-5954.

42. Dudley Herald 4 April 1874; BPP Select Committee on the Scarcity and Dearness of Coal 1873: Evidence of Thomas Griffiths Q 6002-6009.

43. A. Fox, op cit p. 39.

44. ibid.

45. Wolverhampton Chronicle 31 August & 7 September 1864.

46. Stourbridge Observer 30 April 1870.

47. See Chapters Five & Six below.

48. A. Fox, op cit p. 76; County Advertiser for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 25 December 1880.

49. See Chapter 10 p.380-1.

50. Griffiths' Guide to the Iron Trade of Great Britain (1873) p. 253-6 & 268-71.

51. Walsall Observer 7 June 1873 & 4 April 1874.

52. Walsall Observer 7 June 1873.

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53. G.D.H. Cole, Some Notes on British Trade Unionism in the Third Quarter of the Nineteenth Century in International Review for Social History II (1937) Reprinted in E.M. Carus-Wilson (ed) Essays in Economic History Vol. Three (1962) p. 211; Wolverhampton Chronicle 9 October 1872.

54. Dudley Herald 15 March 1873.

55. Wolverhampton Chronicle 11 March 1874; Walsall Observer 14 March 1874.

56. Wolverhampton Chronicle 18 March 1874.

57. ibid, 25 March & 1 April 1874.

58. Dudley Herald 11 April 1874.

59. ibid; Wolverhampton Chronicle 15 April 1874.

60. Wolverhampton Chronicle 20 May 1874.

61. ibid, 10 June 1874.

62. Dudley Herald 27 June 1874.

63. Wolverhampton Chronicle 15 July 1874.

64. Walsall Observer 18 July 1874; Dudley Herald 18 July 1874.

65. Dudley Herald 25 July & 1 August 1874; Wolverhampton Chronicle 29 July 1874.

66. Bilston Herald 26 July 1875.

67. Birmingham Weekly Post 28 August 1875.

68. A. Fox, op cit p. 70-71.

69. Wolverhampton Chronicle 1 November 1876.

70. Dudley Herald 9 & 16 October 1875.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

pages 156-166

1. Wolverhampton Chronicle 7 March 1877.
2. ibid, 22 August 1877.
3. West Bromwich Free Press 20 October 1877.
4. Wolverhampton Chronicle 24 & 31 October, 7 & 14 November 1877.
5. West Bromwich Free Press 9 February 1878.
6. ibid.
7. R. Page Arnot, The Miners (1949) p. 61.
8. Wolverhampton Chronicle 30 July & 22 October 1879.
9. See Appendix Two p. 555-58.
10. West Bromwich Free Press 9 February 1878; Wolverhampton Chronicle 27 August & 10 September 1879.
11. Wolverhampton Chronicle 14 & 21 May 1879.
12. Dudley Herald 17, 24 & 31 January 1880.
13. Wolverhampton Chronicle 14 April 1880; Fisher Smith was the Earl of Dudley's principal agent.
14. ibid, 5 May 1880.
15. Wolverhampton Chronicle 19 May 1880; County Advertiser for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 12 June 1880.
16. Wolverhampton Chronicle 23 June 1880. Speech by Thomas Halliday at Willenhall.
17. Wolverhampton Chronicle 19 & 26 October 1881.
18. ibid, 9 March 1881.
19. Wolverhampton Chronicle 26 October & 23 November 1881.
20. Dudley Herald 14 January 1882.
21. Wolverhampton Chronicle 8 March 1882.

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22. Dudley Herald 8 April 1882; Wolverhampton Chronicle 5 & 12 April 1882.

23. Wolverhampton Chronicle 4 & 11 October 1882; Dudley Herald 7 & 14 October 1882.

24. A. Fox, op cit p. 73, and see Map Three at p. 11 in Chapter One.

25. Mining and Mineral Statistics of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for 1886 (C-5132 1887), and see Maps Four and Five at p. 13 in Chapter One.

26. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 68.

27. Wolverhampton Chronicle 10 January 1883; County Advertiser for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 13 January 1883.

28. Wolverhampton Chronicle 2 May 1883.

29. ibid, 9 May 1883.

30. Wolverhampton Chronicle 15 & 29 August 1883.

31. ibid, 29 August 1883.

32. ibid, 24 October 1883.

33. ibid, 7 November 1883.

34. ibid, 28 November & 5 December 1883.

35. ibid, 30 April 1884.

36. ibid, 21 May 1884. Haden Corser resigned as president of the Wages Board in March 1884 on being adopted by the Conservative Party as a prospective Parliamentary candidate in Stoke on Trent.

37. Dudley Herald 7 June 1884; Wolverhampton Chronicle 11 June 1884; Wednesbury Herald 7 & 14 June 1884.

38. This account of the circumstances surrounding the origins of the strike is based on proceedings in the case of Medley vs. The Sandwell Park Colliery Company Ltd., heard at Dudley County Court on 29 September 1884. A transcript of the evidence given in this case is held at West Bromwich Public Library. For an account of the trial see Wolverhampton Chronicle 1 October 1884 and Dudley Herald 4 October 1884.

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39. Dudley Herald 28 June 1884; Midland Advertiser 28 June 1884.

40. Dudley Herald 23 August 1884; Wednesbury Herald 23 August 1884.

41. Dudley Herald 23 August 1884; Wednesbury Herald 23 August 1884.

42. Dudley Herald 6 September 1884; Wednesbury Herald 6 September 1884.

43. Dudley Herald 13 September 1884; Wednesbury Herald 13 September 1884.

44. Dudley Herald 27 September, 4, 11 & 18 October 1884.

45. Wolverhampton Chronicle 25 February & 20 May 1885.

46. Wolverhampton Chronicle 1 December 1886; Labour Tribune 4 December 1886.

47. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 105 & 108.

48. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 278-80; A. Fox, op cit p.85-6

49. Ironworkers Journal September 1887.

50. Dudley Herald 6, 13 & 20 October 1888; Labour Tribune 13 October 1888.

51. Dudley Herald 13 October 1888.

52. ibid.

53. ibid, 20 October 1888.

54. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 95-6.

55. ibid, p. 96-7; Wolverhampton Chronicle 3 April 1889.

56. Wolverhampton Chronicle 10, 17 & 24 April 1889; Labour Tribune 27 April 1889.

57. Labour Tribune 11 May 1889.

58. Wolverhampton Chronicle 29 May 1889; Labour Tribune 1 June 1889; R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 98-9.

59. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 100-101.

60. ibid, p. 108.

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61. Labour Tribune 4 January & 19 April 1890;
Dudley Herald 1, 8, 15, 22 & 29 March,
7 June, 23 August 1890.

62. Dudley Herald 13 September 1890.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

pages 192-199

1. A. Fox, op cit p. 89.

2. Labour Tribune 19 April 1890.

3. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 116.

4. Wolverhampton Chronicle 11 & 25 February, 27 May, 14 & 28 October 1891.

5. BPP Royal Commission on Labour 1892 Group A Vol. II Evidence of Colonel J.B. Cochrane Q 10851 & 10858.

6. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 206.

7. ibid, p. 208-9. Despite telegrams requesting the attendance of delegates from the 'outside districts' of Durham, Northumberland, Scotland, and South Wales being sent from the conference only one such delegate attended, this being John Weir from Scotland.

8. Dudley Herald 27 February 1892.

9. ibid.

10. ibid, 19 March 1892.

11. ibid, 16 & 30 April 1892.

12. ibid, 14 May 1892.

13. M.F.G.B. Executive Minute 10 February 1893, quoted by Page Arnot, op cit, p. 222.

14. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 222.

15. M.F.G.B. Executive Minute 17 March 1893, quoted by Page Arnot, op cit p. 223.

16. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 224.

17. ibid, p. 228-9.

18. Wolverhampton Chronicle 2 August 1893.

19. Midland Evening News 10 August 1893; Wolverhampton Chronicle 16 August 1893.

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20. Wolverhampton Chronicle 16 August 1893.

21. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 231-2.

22. Wolverhampton Chronicle 30 August 1893; Midland Evening News 6 September 1893.

23. Wolverhampton Chronicle 13 September 1893.

24. Midland Evening News 18-23 September 1893 (inclusive); Wolverhampton Chronicle 20 & 27 September 1893.

25. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 234, 244, 249-52.

26. ibid, p. 224.

27. Wolverhampton Chronicle 20 December 1893.

28. ibid, 4 April 1894.

29. ibid, 11 April & 2 May 1894; Dudley Herald 7 April & 5 May 1894.

30. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 254-5.

31. Dudley Herald. 1 & 8 September 1894; Wolverhampton Chronicle 5 September 1894.

32. Wolverhampton Chronicle 19 September 1894.

33. Dudley Herald 23 July 1898.

34. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 309; Wolverhampton Chronicle 5 October 1898.

35. Wolverhampton Chronicle 15 February 1899; Dudley Herald 18 February 1899.

36. Wolverhampton Chronicle 23 August 1899; A Record of Coal Prices and Miners Wages in South Staffordshire & East Worcestershire

37. Wolverhampton Chronicle 5 July & 20 December 1899.

38. A. Fox, op cit p. 96-97.

39. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 279-80; A.J. Taylor, op cit p. 231.

40. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 46, 104; BPP Royal Commission on Mines 1908 Vol. 3 Evidence of Thomas Mansell Q 36739-40.

notes to pages 210-220

41. Copies of a report of the proceedings in this case, together with statements of press and professional opinion on its implications, are held in the Local History Collections at Wolverhampton Public Library, ref. L 3431 and Dudley Public Library, ref. LD 622.33P.

42. BPP Royal Commission on Mines 1908 Vol. 3 Evidence of Thomas Mansell Q 36795-6 & 36851-2.

43. BPP Miners Eight Hour Day Committee 1907 Final Report (Cd 3426) Evidence of H.W. Hughes Q 11440-11458.

44. BPP Royal Commission on Mines 1908 Vol. 3 Evidence of Thomas Mansell Q 36839 & 36843.

45. A. Fox, op cit p. 99; Wolverhampton Chronicle 3 April 1912.

46. J.M. Bellamy & J. Saville (ed), A Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol. 1 (1972) p. 100 Wolverhampton Chronicle 10 February 1909; County Herald for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 14 June, 19 July 1913.

47. R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 273-4.

48. S. & B. Webb, The History of Trade Unionism (1920 edition) p. 365.

49. The Miner 24 March 1876; County Advertiser for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 14 August 1880 et seq; The Engineer 23 June 1882.

50. For an account of the proceedings and verdict in this case see Wolverhampton Chronicle 29 March and 17 May 1882. For the reversal of the original decision by the Appeal Court see Wolverhampton Chronicle 21 June 1882 and Ironworkers Journal July 1882.

51. Rules of the South Staffordshire & Worcestershire Permanent Provident Society. Public Record Office FS 3/418.

52. Wolverhampton Chronicle 19 July 1899.

53. ibid; Rules of the South Staffordshire & East Worcestershire Mining District Compensation Fund. Public Record Office FS 3/420.

54. For an account of proceedings in this case see Wolverhampton Chronicle 6 November 1901 and Dudley Herald 9 November 1901.

notes to pages 221-231

55. Wolverhampton Chronicle 11 December 1901; County Advertiser for Staffordshire & Worcestershire

56. Transactions and Results of the M.N.A. Conference held at Leeds, 9-14 November 1863 p. 14. Quoted by B. McCormick & J.E. Williams, The Miners and the Eight Hour Day 1863-1910 in Economic History Review (Second Series) Vol. XII No. 2 1959 p. 223.

57. ibid, p. 224; R. Page Arnot, op cit p. 138-151 & 330-6.

58. A. Fox, op cit p. 94.

59. See, inter alia, Dudley Herald 1 September 1894; Wolverhampton Chronicle 5 May 1897; Dudley Herald 5 February 1898.

60. BPP Miners Eight Hour Day Committee 1907 Final Report (Cd 3426) Evidence of H.W. Hughes Q 11468-11497; Elijah Wearing Q 11505-11596; A.W. Grazebrook Q 11807-11887; Wolverhampton Chronicle 13 May 1908.

61. Wolverhampton Chronicle 25 November 1908; Dudley Herald 28 November 1908.

62. Wolverhampton Chronicle 10 March 1909.

63. ibid, 19 April 1911.

64. R. Page Arnot, The Miners: Years of Struggle (1953) p. 57, 80, 85-6.

65. ibid, p. 90-91.

66. Wolverhampton Chronicle 17 January 1912.

67. ibid, 28 February 1912; County Herald for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 2 March 1912.

68. County Herald for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 2, 9, 16 & 30 March 1912; Wolverhampton Chronicle 13 & 27 March 1912.

69. R. Page Arnot, The Miners: Years of Struggle p. 106-109.

70. ibid, p. 109-110.

71. County Herald for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 6 & 13 April 1912; West Bromwich Weekly News 6 & 13 April 1912; Wolverhampton Chronicle 3 & 10 April 1912.

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72. Birmingham Daily Post 6 April 1912;
A. Fox, op cit p. 102.

73. County Herald for Staffordshire & Worcestershire
27 April, 4, 11, 18, 25 May, 1 & 8 June 1912.

74. The full text of Sir Walter Lawrence's award is given as Appendix Three, p. 559-564.

75. County Herald for Staffordshire & Worcestershire
8 & 15 June 1912; Wolverhampton Chronicle
5 & 12 June 1912.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

pages 239-244

1. A.T. Kidd, History of the Tin-Plate Workers & Sheet Metal Workers & Braziers Societies (1949) p. 74; B. Jones, Co-operative Production (1894) p. 437-8.

2. A.T. Kidd, op cit p. 85.

3. B. Jones, op cit p. 438-443.

4. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 132.

5. BPP Royal Commission on Labour 1892 Group A Vol.II Evidence of Richard Juggins Q 17914-19, Edward Day Q 18128-31, Joseph Martin Q 18337-8.

6. BPP Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System 1889 Third Report. Evidence of Thomas Homer Q 18185-7; Dudley Herald 17 February 1894; R.H. Tawney, Studies in the Minimum Wage No. 1 (1914) p. 6.

7. BPP Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System 1889 Third Report. Evidence of Richard Juggins Q 18034-5.

8. G.J. Barnsby, Social Conditions in the Black Country in the Nineteenth Century (Birmingham Ph.D 1969) p. 19 & 326-7; BPP Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System 1889 Third Report. Evidence of Richard Juggins Q 17639-40 and 18701-2, Thomas Homer Q 18238-40; BPP Royal Commission on Labour 1892 Group A Vol.II Evidence of Joseph Martin Q 18333, Richard Juggins Q 17845-50 & 18055-18071.

9. W.H.B. Court, The Rise of the Midland Industries (1938) p. 201-3; A. Fox, op cit p. 191.

10. BPP Children's Employment Commission Third Report 1864 (3414-1) Vol. XXII p. 11-12 and 15-31. For an account of the hiring system in one particular firm see R.A. Church, Kenricks in Hardwire (1969) p. 54-9.

11. R.A. Church, op cit p. 279.

12. Richard Tangye, One and All (1889) p. 123-4.

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13. R.A. Church, op cit p. 308.

14. See Chapter One p. 17.

15. S. Timmins (ed), op cit p. 114 and 116.

16. For a detailed account of working conditions and methods of payment in the nail trade see E.J. Davies, The Hand-made Nail Trade of Birmingham and District (Birmingham MA 1933)

17. BPP Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System 1889 Third Report. Evidence of John Price Q 19975.

18. Wolverhampton Chronicle, 15 September 1869.

19. Dudley Herald 6 July 1872; Wolverhampton Chronicle 31 July 1872; Stourbridge Observer 8 June and 10 August 1872.

20. Dudley Herald 25 April and 2 May 1874.

21. Stourbridge Observer 14 August 1869, 15 February 1870 and 21 November 1874.

22. A. Fox, op cit p. 203.

23. BPP Report of the Labour Correspondent of the Board of Trade as to the condition of Nail Makers and Small Chainmakers in South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire 1888 p. 10 and 11.

24. B. Jones, op cit p. 471-5.

25. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 133.

26. This account of the organisation of production in the flint glass trade is based on the evidence given by W.H. Packwood, Major J. Walker and J.B. Stone before the Royal Commission on the Workshop and Factory Acts 1875, reprinted in the Flint Glass Makers' Magazine August 1875.

27. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 134-5.

28. See Chapter Eight p. 301.

29. Flint Glass Makers' Magazine December 1863.

30. ibid, May 1869.

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31. For a retrospective account of this dispute see the Flint Glass Makers' Magazine November 1876 to November 1878 inclusive.

32. E. Hopkins, op cit p. 273, quoting evidence of T.J. Wilkinson before Royal Commission on Trade Unions 1867-9, Tenth Report p. 32.

33. Balance Sheet of the United Glass Cutters Society January-July 1857 quoted by Hopkins, op cit p. 270.

34. Balance Sheet of the United Glass Cutters Society June 1879 quoted by Hopkins, op cit p. 270.

35. Flint Glassmakers' Magazine May and August 1879.

36. ibid, May and November 1889, October 1893.

37. This account of the origins and growth of the nut and bolt trade is based on J.A.C. Baker, op cit Chapters One and Two. The oliver was a spring mounted hammer. The spring mounting allowed a heavier hammer head to be used, and also gave rise to the use of special heads for particular tasks, allowing the production of ironwork to a standard.

38. ibid.

39. The Engineer 15 March 1867.

40. BPP Royal Commission on Labour 1892 Group A Vol II Evidence of Richard Juggins Q 17772.

41. Dudley Herald 20 August 1870.

42. ibid, 12 November 1870; Wolverhampton Chronicle 16 November 1870.

43. Dudley Herald 19 November 1870.

44. J.A.C. Baker, op cit p. 35.

45. Dudley Herald 16 December 1871.

46. ibid, 6 and 13 January 1872; Wolverhampton Chronicle 17 January 1872. The Employers' Association appears to have originated with this dispute.

47. Dudley Herald 20 January 1872.

48. Wolverhampton Chronicle 20 March 1872.

49. ibid, 15 May 1872.

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50. BPP Royal Commission on Labour 1892.Group A Vol II Evidence of Richard Juggins Q 17789-92.

51. Wolverhampton Chronicle 24 March 1875 and 19 July 1876.

52. West Bromwich Free Press 7 April 1877.

53. Wolverhampton Chronicle 28 March, 9 & 16 May 1877; BPP Royal Commission on Labour 1892 Group A Vol II. Evidence of Richard Juggins Q 17793.

54. West Bromwich Free Press 7 April 1877; Wolverhampton Chronicle 6 and 13 June 1877.

55. Wolverhampton Chronicle 11 July, 15 and 22 August, 19 and 26 September, 24 October & 7 November 1877; BPP Royal Commission on Labour 1892 Group A Vol II Evidence of Richard Juggins Q 17791.

56. Wolverhampton Chronicle 20 February 1878.

57. ibid, 17 and 31 August 1881.

58. J.A.C. Baker, op cit p. 68,quoting Richard Juggins at Nut & Bolt Makers' Association half-yearly meeting May 1884.

59. Wolverhampton Chronicle 23 August 1882; Dudley Herald 26 August 1882; County Herald for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 26 August 1882.

60. Wolverhampton Chronicle 10 January, 14 February, 7 and 14 March 1883.

61. Wolverhampton Chronicle 18 February 1885.

62. ibid, 4 & 11 March, 8 & 22 April 1885.

63. On the origins and growth of the Knights of Labour in the U.S.A. see Henry Pelling, American Labour (1960) Chapter Three.

64. Henry Pelling, The Knights of Labour in Britain 1880-1901 in Economic History Review (Second Series) Vol IX No. 2 1956 p. 314; West Bromwich Free Press 30 January 1886.

65. Labour Tribune 1 September 1888.

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pages 277-282

1. Labour Tribune 27 March, 1 & 8 May 1886; Midland Advertiser 22 June 1889.

2. Midland Advertiser 22 June 1889.

3. On the 3/6 list chainmakers would be paid 3/6 per cwt. for best half-inch chain, which was the standard gauge from which the price of all other kinds of chain was computed. There are 27 links of half-inch chain to the yard and 14 yards to the cwt, making 378 links to the cwt. A good craftsman, by working hard and long, could probably make six cwt. of such chain per week. On the 3/6 list he would thus earn about 21/- per week, out of which he would have to pay his blower 3/6 to 4/-. In addition there would be deductions for rent, firing and hire of tools, leaving the craftsman net earnings of perhaps 15/- per week. This would be for a good craftsman working very long hours. Typical earnings might well be 25-50% less than this.

4. On the establishment and operation of the Chain Trade Board see Chapter Eight p. 310-11.

5. Midland Advertiser 1 September 1888.

6. ibid, 22 & 29 June 1889, 19 July 1890.

7. Wednesbury Herald, Midland Advertiser 23 February 1889; The Ironmonger 23 February, 21 September, 12 October, 16 & 30 November 1889. It is commonly thought that the alliance philosophy was pioneered by E.J. Smith, H.A. Clegg, A. Fox and A.F. Thompson, A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889 Vol 1 (1964) state, with reference to the Birmingham bedstead industry, (p.194), that 'E.J. Smith evolved a scheme for a close alliance between the union and the associated manufacturers which was designed to safeguard the interests of both' and the Birmingham Bedstead Alliance is usually cited as the first of its kind.

8. Midland Advertiser 22, 29 June 1889; 4 July 1891.

9. ibid, 20 June 1891.

10. Wednesbury Herald 23 June 1894.

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11. Wolverhampton Chronicle 4 July 1900.

12. Stourbridge County Express 6 July 1901.

13. Wolverhampton Chronicle 13 April 1904, 19 April 1911, 3 June 1914.

14. Wolverhampton Chronicle 30 March 1910, 19 April 1911, 14 May 1913.

15. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 250.

16. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 256-7; BPP Board of Trade Enquiry into Cost of Living of the Working Classes in the United Kingdom 1908 (Cd 3864) p. 487.

17. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 273-4.

18. J.A.C. Baker, op cit p. 141; West Bromwich Chronicle 4 July 1913.

19. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 253, 256.

20. J.A.C. Baker, op cit p. 142.

21. S.J. Chapman & H.M. Hallsworth, Unemployment in Lancashire (1909) p. 83, quoted by E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men (Weidenfeld Goldback edition 1968) p. 181.

22. E.J. Hobsbawm, op cit p. 179.

23. See Annual Reports of the Midland Counties Trades Federation for these years. Reports for 1889 and 1896 in Webb Collection Coll. E.C. 111. Reports for 1901, 1904 and 1913 in Wolverhampton Chronicle 3 July 1901, 13 April 1904, 14 May 1913.

24. See Reports of Federation's Annual Conference for the years concerned in Wolverhampton Chronicle 3 July 1901, 22 April 1903, 3 May 1905, 22 April 1908.

25. County Herald for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 30 May 1914. This passage is from the report of the executive council to the 28th Annual Conference of the Federation, but it was written by John Taylor.

26. H. Pelling, The Knights of Labour in Britain 1880-1901 in Economic History Review (Second Series) Vol IX No. 2 1956 p. 330-1.

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27. ibid, p. 321-3; Wolverhampton Chronicle 20 & 27 February 1889.

28. For the prosecutions see Birmingham Workman's Times 15 August 1890 and Oldbury Weekly News 4 October 1890.

29. H. Pelling, op cit p. 326.

30. ibid, p. 328; Labour Tribune 23 May 1891; Reports of Registrar of Friendly Societies 1891 (310) p. 121, and 1898 (150) p. 123.

31. Flint Glassmakers' Magazine October 1896.

32. ibid.

33. Stourbridge County Express 22 March 1902.

34. County Advertiser for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 25 October 1902, 13 June & 25 July 1903, 3 December 1904.

35. Flint Glassmakers' Magazine April 1911.

36. Wolverhampton Chronicle 27 April 1887.

37. See p. 279-80 above.

38. Wolverhampton Chronicle 8 & 15 February, 1 & 29 March 1893.

39. BPP Labour Department of the Board of Trade Report on Strikes and Lockouts in 1893 (C7566) p.258. The revised rules are given in Appendix Four P. 565-65C

40. BPP Royal Commission on Labour 1892 Group A Vol II. Evidence of Richard Juggins Q 17774-75.

41. Wolverhampton Chronicle 12 August 1896, 28 April 1897, 17 January 1900.

42. J.A.C. Baker, op cit p. 74.

43. BPP Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System 1889 Third Report. Evidence of Thomas Lees Q 19981-90 and William Price Q 20093-5.

44. BPP Labour Department of the Board of Trade Report on Trades Unions 1893 & 1895 (C7808); County Advertiser for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 16 April 1892, 1 April & 17 June 1893; Wolverhampton Chronicle 18 October 1893.

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45. BPP Board of Trade Report on Collective Agreements 1910 (Cd 5366) p. 114.

46. R.H. Tawney, op cit p. 2-3.

47. Report of the Labour Correspondent of the Board of Trade as to the condition of Nail Makers and Small Chain Makers in South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire 1888 p. 28. For the earnings of chainmakers see p. 30-1 of this report.

48. ibid, p. 38.

49. Rule 3a, Rule Book of National Amalgamation of Chainmakers' & Strikers' Associations 1889.

50. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 254; Stourbridge County Express 18 March and 29 April 1893; County Advertiser for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 11 March and 4 November 1893; Labour Department of the Board of Trade Report on Strikes and Lockouts 1893 (C7566) Appendix II p. 210-2.

51. Wolverhampton Chronicle 15 July 1896; Souvenir of the Semi-Jubilee of the Chainmakers' & Strikers' Association 1914 p.2.

52. Souvenir p. 9.

53. Wolverhampton Chronicle 15 July 1896; Twenty fourth Annual Report of the Chainmakers' & Strikers' Association in Stourbridge County Express 19 July 1913.

54. Examples of genuine and bogus certificates are reproduced in Appendix I to the Third Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System 1889 p. 695-6. See also Stourbridge County Express 1 May 1897 for an account of a High Court case which revealed a great deal about this practice, described by the judge as 'disgraceful in the highest degree.'

55. Souvenir of the Semi-Jubilee of the Chainmakers' & Strikers Association 1914 p. 29.

56. BPP Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System 1890 Fifth Report p. LXXXVII

57. R.H. Tawney, op cit p. 25.

58. ibid, p. 27-9.

59. ibid, p. 27, 74, 102.

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60. A.T. Kidd, op cit p. 197-9.

61. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 262; BPP Fair Wages Committee of the House of Commons 1908 (Cd 4423) Evidence of Charles Hickin Q 516-7.

62. BPP Fair Wages Committee of the House of Commons 1908 (Cd 4423) Evidence of Charles Hickin Q 550-8 and Q 570-3.

63. ibid, Evidence of Charles Hickin Q 524-5.

64. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 263-4.

65. Wolverhampton Chronicle 4 January 1893; E. Hopkins, op cit p. 283; A.T. Kidd, op cit p. 152 and 162.

66. Wolverhampton Chronicle 4 January, 1, 8 and 15 February 1893.

67. Wolverhampton Chronicle 3 April, 15 May, 25 September, 9 & 16 October, 6 November, 4 December 1895; County Advertiser for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 25 May, 1 June, 17 August, 14 September, 12 October, 9 & 30 November 1895.

68. E. Hopkins, op cit p. 293.

69. Stourbridge County Express 29 September 1906.

70. ibid; BPP Fair Wages Committee of the House of Commons 1908 (Cd 4423). Evidence of Simeon Webb Q 3006-10.

71. Stourbridge County Express 27 February & 10 July 1909.

72. Stourbridge County Express 10 July 1909.

73. ibid, 20 September 1913.

74. BPP Royal Commission on Labour 1892 Group A Vol II Evidence of Edward Day Q 18097-18104 and Joseph Martin Q 18366-68.

75. ibid, Evidence of Edward Day Q 18112-20.

76. ibid, Evidence of Edward Day Q 18127-35, 18146-48, 18288-92, 18306-14, and Joseph Martin Q 18350-51.

77. Wolverhampton Chronicle 11 December 1895.

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78. ibid, 15 February 1899.

79. ibid, 3 September 1902.

80. ibid, 14 January and 4 March 1903.

81. ibid, 10 February 1904 & 1 January 1908.

82. ibid, 13 March & 3 April 1912, 19 February 1913.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER NINE

pages 325-334

1. E.J. Hobsbawm, op cit p. 171-2.

2. R. Hyman, The Workers' Union (Oxford D. Phil 1968) p. 430. This work referred to hereafter as Hyman thesis to distinguish it from the book of the same name.

3. H.A. Clegg, General Union in a Changing Society (1964) p. 12 & 33.

4. ibid, p. 1, 9, 29-30; BPP Royal Commission on Labour 1892 Group A Vol II. Evidence of Richard Juggins Q 17950.

5. J. Corbett, Birmingham Trades Council 1866-1966 (1966) p. 53-4, 56-7.

6. Dudley Herald 25 January & 4 October 1890, 30 April 1892; Wolverhampton Chronicle 5 June 1895, 24 June & 16 December 1896; Stourbridge County Express 11 May 1901.

7. Wolverhampton Chronicle 28 April and 5 May 1897; County Advertiser for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 10 February 1901; Wolverhampton Chronicle 23 June 1909.

8. Wolverhampton Chronicle 16 March and 22 June 1910; Wolverhampton Express & Star 14 March & 17 June 1910; Interview with Mr. J.C. Mason, June 1972. Mr. Mason is the Birmingham regional secretary of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers and the son of James Cooksey Mason referred to in this thesis.

9. G.C. Allen, op cit Part Four Chapter Four passim.

10. See above Chapter. Eight p. 286-9.

11. G.C. Allen, op cit p. 319; Victoria County History of Stafford Vol 2 p. 182-3.

12. Workers' Union Record December 1914 quoted by R.A. Church op cit p. 293.

13. R. Hyman, The Workers' Union (1971) p. 29. This work referred to hereafter as Hyman book to distinguish it from the doctoral thesis of the same name.

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14. R.A. Church, op cit p. 293.

15. West Bromwich Chronicle 2, 9, 16 June 1911; West Bromwich Free Press 2, 3, 9, 10, 16, 17 June 1911.

16. West Bromwich Chronicle 22 & 29 September 1911.

17. ibid, 18 & 25 August 1911; West Bromwich Free Press 18, 19, 25, 26 August 1911.

18. Wolverhampton Chronicle 24 & 31 May 1911; Workers' Union Annual Report 1911.

19. Workers' Union Record March 1917.

20. West Bromwich Chronicle 10 May & 7 June 1912; West Bromwich Free Press 10 & 11 May, 7 & 8 June 1912.

21. West Bromwich Chronicle 12 July & 16 August 1912; West Bromwich Free Press 16 & 17 August 1912.

22. County Herald for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 27 April, 16 November, 28 December 1912.

23. West Bromwich Chronicle 19 April, 12 July, 22 November 1912; West Bromwich Free Press 19 & 20 April, 12 & 13 July, 22 & 23 November 1912.

24. A. Fox, op cit p. 352; R. Hyman book p. 49-50.

25. R. Hyman book p. 50.

26. West Bromwich Chronicle 27 September 1912; Interview with Mr. Matt. Jones of West Bromwich, January 1970. Mr. Jones was an active member of the Workers' Union at the time of the 1913 strike, and took part in the clandestine recruiting campaign.

27. R. Hyman book p. 51.

28. Interview with Mr. Matt. Jones January 1970.

29. On Tangyes see Chapter Seven above p. 244. R. Hyman book p. 51.

30. J. Leask & P. Bellars 'Nor Shall the Sword Sleep...'(n.d.) p. 8.

31. R.A. Church, op cit p. 295; West Bromwich Chronicle 11, 18, 25 April 1913; West Bromwich Free Press 11, 12, 18, 19, 25, 26 April 1913.

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32. West Bromwich Chronicle 25 April & 2 May 1913; West Bromwich Free Press 25 & 26 April, 2 & 3 May 1913.

33. R. Hyman book p. 52; West Bromwich Chronicle 25 April 1913; West Bromwich Free Press 25 & 26 April 1913.

34. West Bromwich Chronicle 2 May 1913; West Bromwich Free Press 2 & 3 May 1913.

35. Wolverhampton Chronicle 23 October 1912.

36. ibid, 30 April 1913.

37. ibid, 14 & 21 May 1913; Walsall Observer 10, 17 and 24 May 1913.

38. This leaflet is reproduced as Appendix Five p.566.

39. West Bromwich Chronicle 30 May 1913; West Bromwich Free Press 30 and 31 May 1913.

40. County Herald for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 24 & 31 May 1913; Stourbridge County Express 24 & 31 May 1913.

41. R. Hyman book p. 55-6.

42. See Wolverhampton Express & Star for week 2-7 June 1913.

43. Daily Citizen 11 June 1913, quoted by Hyman book p. 56.

44. J. Leask & P. Bellars op cit p. 19; R. Hyman book p. 56.

45. R. Hyman thesis p. 76.

46. West Bromwich Chronicle 27 June 1913; R. Hyman thesis p. 76.

47. R. Hyman thesis p. 77.

48. Wolverhampton Express & Star 2, 3, 4 & 5 July 1913.

49. Wolverhampton Express & Star 8 July 1913.

50. West Bromwich Chronicle 11 July 1913; County Herald for Staffordshire & Worcestershire 12 July 1913; Wolverhampton Chronicle 9 July 1913.

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51. The full text of the agreement is reproduced as Appendix Six p.567-571.

52. A.D. Flanders, Collective Bargaining; A Theoretical Analysis in British Journal of Industrial Relations Vol. 6 1968. p. 12 and 26.

53. ibid, p. 26.

54. ibid, p. 17.

55. R. Hyman book p. 59; Wolverhampton Chronicle 9 July 1913; Walsall Observer 12 July 1913.

56. Wolverhampton Chronicle 16 July 1913; J. Leask & P. Bellars, op cit p. 25.

57. Daily Citizen 31 May 1913 quoted by R. Hyman, book p. 59.

58. R. Hyman book p. 61.

59. On the hollow-ware trade see Chapter Eight p.314-6; on brickmaking see list of wages and hours dated October 1913 held at Birmingham office of National Union of General and Municipal Workers.

60. Minutes of Fire-brick Trade Wages and Conciliation Board 2 December 1913 and 21 April 1914; minutes of the board's standing committee 31 December 1913 and 11 March 1914. Minute books held at Birmingham office of National Union of General and Municipal Workers.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER TEN

pages 361-368

1. BPP Electoral Returns Boroughs & Counties 1865-66 (3626) 1866 p. 12, 20, 21, 120, 238, 254.

2. ibid.

3. John Vincent, The Formation of the British Liberal Party 1857-68 (Pelican edition 1972) p. 116-7.

4. ibid.

5. ibid p.21 & 103, quoting a connectional journal of the period.

6. A complete table of parliamentary election results in Black Country constituencies from 1865 to December 1910 is given in Appendix Seven p. 572-75.

7. Wolverhampton Chronicle 12 July 1865.

8. F.B. Smith, The Making of the Second Reform Bill (1966) p. 61.

9. Wolverhampton Chronicle 4 April 1866.

10. Wolverhampton Chronicle 11 April 1866.

11. Wolverhampton Chronicle 6 & 27 June 1866.

12. F.B. Smith, op cit p. 115.

13. For an account of the Brookfields demonstration see A.D. Bell, The Reform League from its Origins to the Reform Act of 1867 (Oxford D. Phil 1961) p. 245-6.

14. Wolverhampton Chronicle 26 September & 3 October 1866.

15. For a complete list of provincial branches of the Reform League see Bell op cit p. 178-202.

16. M. Cowling, 1867: Disraeli Gladstone & Revolution (1967) p. 242-8.

17. For an account of the rivalries and oppositions within the national reform movement see M. Cowling op cit Chapter Seven and A.D. Bell op cit Chapter Seven.

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18. Wolverhampton Chronicle 20 & 27 February 1867.

19. Wolverhampton Chronicle 17 & 24 April 1867.

20. Wolverhampton Chronicle 24 April & 8 May 1867; West Bromwich Times 8 & 15 June, 6 July 1867.

21. Sir David Lindsay Keir, The Constitutional History of Modern Britain since 1485 (Eighth Edition 1966) p. 416.

22. BPP Electoral Returns Boroughs & Counties 1865-66 (3626) 1866 p. 12, 20, 21, 120, 238, 254; J. Vincent & M. Stenton (eds) McCalmont's Parliamentary Poll Book of All Elections 1832-1918 (1971) Part One p. 92, 300, 322. Electorate of 1866 taken as percentage of population of 1861, electorate of 1868 taken as percentage of population of 1871. A comparison in terms of absolute figures is not possible for Dudley and Walsall because the constituency boundaries were altered by the 1868 Redistribution Act.

23. These percentages derived from figures given in BPP Electoral Returns Boroughs & Counties 1865-66 (3626) p. 120 for Dudley, p. 254 for Wolverhampton.

24. West Bromwich Times 11 July, 1, 8, 15 August 1868.

25. West Bromwich Times 29 August 1868.

26. Dudley Herald 22 August 1868; West Bromwich Times 22 August, 26 September, 17 & 31 October 1868.

27. Dudley Herald 22 August, 21 & 28 November 1868; Wolverhampton Chronicle 18 & 25 November 1868.

28. Walsall Observer 25 January & 10 May 1873.

29. Walsall Observer 5 July 1873.

30. W.K. Lamb, British Labour & Parliament 1865-1893 (London Ph.D 1933) Chapter Five; BPP Royal Commission on Mines 1908 Volume Three (Cd 4349) Evidence of Thomas Mansell Q 36843-6.

31. G.D.H. Cole, British Working Class Politics 1832-1914 (1941) p. 63-4.

32. Election Poster 292, Local History Collection, Dudley Public Library; Dudley Herald 4 February 1874 (special edition).

notes to pages 378-385.

33. Dudley Herald 4 & 7 February, 9 May 1874.

34. Wolverhampton Chronicle 4 & 11 February 1874; Walsall Observer 7 & 14 February 1874.

35. Walsall Observer 16 January, 10 July and 11 September 1875; Radical Times 9 December 1876; Bilston Herald 5 May & 9 June 1877.

36. West Bromwich Free Press 17 February 1877.

37. West Bromwich Free Press 10, 17, & 21 February, 3 March 1877.

38. Wolverhampton Chronicle 14 August 1878; 5 February 1879.

39. Dudley Herald 20 & 27 March 1880.

40. Wolverhampton Chronicle 31 March 1880.

41. Wolverhampton Chronicle 7 April 1880.

42. W.K. Lamb, op cit Chapter Eight.

43. See Chapter Seven p. 272-3.

44. Dudley Herald 25 March, 11 November 1882.

45. W. K. Lamb, op cit Chapter Eight.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER ELEVEN

pages 387-395

1. N. Blewett, The Franchise in the United Kingdom 1885-1918 in Past and Present Number 32 December 1965 p. 29.

2. E.H. Fowler, Life of H.H. Fowler, First Viscount Wolverhampton (1912) p. 187.

3. These rather crude percentages derived from population of 1901 and electorate of 1910, as given in J. Vincent & M. Stenton (eds) op cit. For 1868 figures see Chapter Ten p. 371.

4. The Past and Future of Conservative Policy in Quarterly Review October 1869 p. 541-2, quoted by R. McKenzie and A. Silver, Angels in Marble (1968) p. 37.

5. R. McKenzie & A. Silver, op cit p. 48.

6. Wolverhampton Chronicle 4 & 18 November 1885; Midland Advertiser 7 & 21 November 1885.

7. Wolverhampton Chronicle 25 November 1885; on 'Villa Toryism' see J. Cornford, The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century in Victorian Studies Volume 7 1963, esp. p. 52-3.

8. 'Fair Trade' had a short-lived vogue in the 1880s. It was a movement for the introduction of retaliatory tariffs.

9. D.C. Savage, The General Election of 1886 in Great Britain and Ireland (London Ph.D 1958) p.189. For Burt's statement see Labour Standard 4 June 1881.

10. Ironworkers Journal September 1887.

11. Wolverhampton Chronicle 30 June & 7 July 1886.

12. E.H. Fowler, op cit p. 205-7.

13. West Bromwich Free Press 29 May, 12, 19, 26 June 1886; Wolverhampton Chronicle 9, 16, 23, 30 June 1886.

14. Wolverhampton Chronicle 23 & 30 June 1886; Midland Advertiser 19 & 26 June, 3 July 1886; Wednesbury Herald 19 & 26 June, 3 July 1886.

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15. On the Irish vote in Wolverhampton see Wolverhampton Chronicle 30 June 1886.

16. E.H. Fowler, op cit p. 208.

17. W.K. Lamb, op cit Chapter Eight.

18. Report of Twentieth Annual Conference of the T.U.C., Swansea 1887 p. 29 quoted by W.K. Lamb, op cit Chapter Eight.

19. G.J. Barnsby, The Standard of Living in the Black Country during the Nineteenth Century in Economic History Review (Second Series) Vol. XXIV No. 2 May 1971 p. 225 and Social Conditions in the Black Country in the Nineteenth Century p. 57; H.J. Fyrth & H. Collins, The Foundry Workers (1959) p. 87.

20. Walsall Observer 3 November 1888, 13 April 1889. On Sanders and the Knights of Labour in Walsall see above, Chapter Eight p.293-5.

21. On the arrest, committal and trial of Deakin and his colleagues see, inter alia, Walsall Observer and Walsall Free Press 9, 16, 23, 30 January, 6, 13, 20 February, 2 & 9 April 1892; Wolverhampton Chronicle 13, 20, 27 January, 3, 10, 17 February, 6 April 1892; The Times 9 January- 5 April 1892 passim. For a detailed account of the circumstances surrounding the 'plot' see David Nicholl, The Walsall Anarchists (1892). For a summary account see E.P. Thompson, William Morris (1955) p. 681-2 and my biography of Deakin in J.M. Bellamy & J. Saville (eds) A Dictionary of Labour Biography Volume Three (forthcoming). Thompson implies that the 'anarchist complexion' of Walsall Socialist Club predated the plot, but this is doubtful.

22. G.D.H. Cole, British Working Class Politics 1832-1914 (1941) p. 102-3; for a more detailed account of the foundation of the L.E.A. and its activities see W.K. Lamb, op cit Chapter Eight.

23. Labour Tribune 22 May 1886.

24. Dudley Herald 30 May 1891.

25. ibid.

26. Dudley Herald 6 June 1891; Midland Advertiser 20 June 1891.

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27. Wolverhampton Express & Star 1 July 1891;
Midland Advertiser 4 July 1891;
Dudley Herald 4 July 1891.

28. Wolverhampton Express & Star 2 & 8 July 1891;
Wolverhampton Chronicle 15, 29 July, 4 November 1891;
Dudley Herald 25 July, 31 October and 7 November 1891;
Stourbridge County Express 25 July and 31 October 1891;
on the Hanley Congress of the L.E.A. see G.D.H. Cole, British Working Class Politics 1832-1914 p. 113.

29. Nineteenth Century February 1894, quoted by H. Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900 (1954) p.236.

30. G.D.H. Cole, British Working Class Politics 1832-1914 p. 136-8; W.K. Lamb, op cit Chapter Twelve.

31. Wolverhampton Chronicle 18 October & 13 December 1893, 31 January 1894, 4 March 1896.

32. H. Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910 (1967) p. 182.

33. For a short account of the clash between Gladstonians and Liberal Unionists in Worcestershire North see A.G. Gardiner, Life of George Cadbury (n.d.) p. 63-6.

34. In Walsall there had been a by-election in 1893. The Conservative victor of 1892, Frank James, was unseated on petition, over a legal technicality involving the mis-use of hat cards by his supporters. The Liberal, A.D. Hayter, won the by-election, by 79 votes, so the Conservative success in 1895 represented a gain from the Liberals.

35. West Bromwich Free Press 25 & 26 February 1898. Brockhouse was not, in fact, the first member of the I.L.P. to win a seat on the West Bromwich School Board. This distinction belonged to Charles Gibbs, president of the Trades Council, but he had been elected as a Trades Council candidate and not as an I.L.P. candidate. He stood for re-election in February 1898, again as a Trades Council candidate, but was defeated.

36. Wolverhampton Chronicle 21 July 1897.

37. ibid.

38. Wolverhampton Chronicle 8 & 29 March 1893.

39. Dudley Herald 17 July & 14 August 1897;
Wolverhampton Chronicle 11 August 1897.

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40. Wolverhampton Chronicle 26 January & 2 February 1898.

41. Wolverhampton Express & Star 22 & 24 January 1898.

42. Dudley Herald 29 January 1898;
Wolverhampton Chronicle 2 February 1898.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWELVE

pages 416-422

1. H. Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900 p. 189; G.D.H. Cole, British Working Class Politics 1832-1914 p. 151.

2. H. Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900 p. 216-8; P. Poirier, The Advent of the Labour Party (1958) p. 74.

3. H. Pelling, The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900 p. 219-223; G.D.H. Cole, British Working Class Politics 1832-1914, p. 155; P. Poirier op cit p. 80-85.

4. There were, in fact, only 15 candidates, Keir Hardie being nominated in both Preston and Merthyr.

5. R. Price, An Imperial War and the British Working Class (1972) p. 98.

6. ibid, p. 99; P. Poirier op cit p. 123.

7. A.S. Griffith-Boscawen, Memories (1925) p. 121.

8. R. Price op cit p. 120.

9. There had been a Liberal victory at a by-election in Walsall in 1893. See note 34 to Chapter Eleven.

10. The course of this campaign can be traced in detail through the Walsall Free Press and the Walsall Observer for September 1900. For a summary account see R. Price op cit p. 118.

11. Wolverhampton Chronicle 3 & 10 October 1900.

12. G.D.H. Cole, British Working Class Politics 1832-1914 p. 160-1; F. Bealey & H. Pelling, Labour and Politics 1900-1906 (1958) p. 49-50.

13. F. Bealey & H. Pelling, op cit p. 53-4; G.D.H. Cole, op cit p. 169. On figures of trade union membership see H.A. Clegg, Alan Fox and A.F. Thompson, op cit p. 489 and G.D.H. Cole, A Short History of the British Working Class Movement 1789-1947 (1948) p. 484.

14. F. Bealey & H. Pelling, op cit p. 95.

15. Labour Party Archives LRC 1/462, 3/413; Wolverhampton Express & Star 3 November 1890; Wolverhampton Chronicle 24 December 1902.

16. Biographical information on Richards from the National Union of the Footwear, Leather and Allied Trades.

17. Labour Party Archives LRC 6/446 and 7/101; Wolverhampton Chronicle 18 February 1903.

18. Labour Party Archives LRC 6/371.

19. Labour Party Archives LRC 6/372.

20. Labour Leader 9 August 1902 quoted by F. Bealey and H. Pelling op cit p136.

21. F. Bealey & H. Pelling op cit p. 51 & 136-7

22. ibid,p.141-2.

23. ibid.

24. Wolverhampton Chronicle 1 April 1903; Dudley Herald 4 April 1903; Stourbridge County Express 4 April 1903.

25. Wolverhampton Chronicle 25 February 1903. The Trades Council did not consider Wolverhampton South as a possible venue. This division lay wholly outside the municipality of Wolverhampton and was, therefore, considered beyond the jurisdiction of the Trades Council; and it was, in any case, held by a Liberal with views sympathetic to labour, in Henry Norman.

26. Midland Advertiser 21 & 28 February 1903.

27. ibid, 28 February 1903.

28. ibid, 14 March 1903.

29. ibid.

30. F. Bealey & H. Pelling, op cit p. 146.

31. For a complete list of the constituencies see F. Bealey and H. Pelling, op cit p. 298-9.

32. Midland Advertiser 14 March 1903.

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33. Midland Advertiser 21 & 28 March 1903; Labour Party Archives LRC 7/97 and 8/49.

34. Labour Party Archives LRC 8/51/2.

35. Labour Party Archives LRC 9/64. Emphasis, eccentric spelling and abbreviations in the original. Harry Brockhouse lived in Hill Top, a part of West Bromwich adjacent to Wednesbury.

36. Labour Party Archives LRC 9/65 i.

37. Labour Party Archives LRC 9/65 ii.

38. Labour Party Archives LRC 9/68/1; Midland Advertiser 27 June & 4 July 1903.

39. Labour Party Archives LRC 9/68/2. In 1906 Conley unsuccessfully contested the Kirkdale division of Liverpool.

40. Labour Party Archives LRC 9/68/1.

41. F. Bealey & H. Pelling, op cit p. 157-8.

42. ibid, p. 146-7.

43. Labour Party Archives LRC 11/528/2, 11/528/3 and 28/353.

44. Wolverhampton Express & Star 19 November 1903.

45. ibid, 15 June 1903.

46. Labour Party Archives LRC 28/29; Wolverhampton Express & Star 4 December 1905.

47. Wolverhampton Express & Star 31 March 1905. By this time Richards had been formally adopted by a broadly based Labour Representation Committee, including members of socialist societies as well as members of the Trades Council, formed at the end of 1904.

48. Wolverhampton Chronicle 6 September 1905.

49. Labour Party Archives LRC 28/29.

50. Wolverhampton Express & Star 7 December 1905.

51. Wolverhampton Chronicle 13 & 20 December 1905.

52. Labour Party Archives LRC 28/28.

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53. Labour Party Archives LRC 28/29 & 28/353; for Thorne's speech in Wednesbury see Wolverhampton Express & Star 8 November 1905.

54. Labour Party Archives LRC 28/31.

55. Labour Leader 22 December 1905.

56. Labour Party Archives LRC 31/323.

57. Walsall Illustrated Journal & Effective Advertiser September 1905.

58. K.D. Brown, The Trade Union Tariff Reform Association 1904-1913 in Journal of British Studies Vol IX Part 2 1970. On the Associations activities in the Black Country see, inter alia, Dudley Herald 26 September 1903 and 10 June 1905.

59. Dudley Herald 30 December 1905.

60. Wolverhampton Chronicle 10 January 1906.

61. Wolverhampton Chronicle 25 February 1903.

62. G.W. Jones, Borough Politics (1969) p. 45-6.

63. Walsall Observer 29 May 1909.

64. Wolverhampton Chronicle 29 April & 6 May 1908.

65. Walsall Observer 31 July & 4 December 1909; Walsall Advertiser 25 December 1909.

66. A. Fox, The National Union of Boot & Shoe Operatives 1874-1957 (1958) p. 336-7.

67. Labour Party Archives LPGC EL/08/1/322 & EL/08/1/323.

68. National Union of Boot & Shoe Operatives Annual Conference Report 1910. The Labour Association was the successor to the Labour Representation Committee in Wolverhampton, and had been responsible for the conduct of Fred. Richards' campaign at the January election. Thia had been conducted on similar lines to the campaign of 1906, ie 'by asking for and accepting the help of any prominent or public person.' In some labour circles this was considered, probably mistakenly, to have been a main contributory factor in Richards' defeat, hence the third condition stipulated in Roberts' letter.

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69. ibid; N. Blewett, The Peers, The Parties & The People: The General Elections of 1910 (1972) p. 298.

70. Wolverhampton Chronicle 16 & 30 November 1910.

71. Midland Liberal Federation Executive Minute 12 January 1911.

72. Labour Party Archives LPGC CAN/06/1/299, CAN/06/1/300 and CAN/06/1/297; Wolverhampton Express & Star 13 February 1912; Railway Clerk 15 February 1912.

73. Wolverhampton Express & Star 13 February 1912.

74. Railway Clerk 15 May 1912; Railway Clerks' Association Annual Reports 1912 & 1913.

75. Walsall Observer 4 April 1903, 7 April & 5 May 1906; K.J. Dean, Town & Westminster (1972) p.20-21.

76. Walsall Observer 16 November 1912.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THIRTEEN

pages 464-484

1. H.A. Clegg, A. Fox & A.F. Thompson, op cit p. 488.

2. ibid.

3. J.R. MacDonald, Socialism & Government (1909) quoted in A. Beattie (ed) English Party Politics Volume Two (1970) p. 296.

4. A. Beattie, op cit p. 224.

5. F. Bealey & H. Pelling, op cit p. 9.

6. See Appendix Two p. 555-58.

7. A. Briggs in Introduction to A. Briggs & J. Saville (eds) Essays in Labour History 1886-1923 (1971) p. 6-7.

8. D.W. Crowley, Origins of the Revolt of the British Labour Movement from Liberalism 1875-1906 (London Ph.D 1952) Chapter Four.

9. S. & B. Webb, Industrial Democracy (1897) p. 842 quoted by Crowley, op cit Chapter Sixteen.

10. R. Harrison, The British Working Class & and General Election of 1868 in International Review of Social History Volume Five 1960 p. 424.

11. ibid.

12. ibid.

13. Labour Leader 9 October 1897.

14. E.J. Hobsbawn, Trade Union Historiography in Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History Number Eight Spring 1964 p. 31.

15. A. Fox, Industrial Relations in Birmingham & the Black Country 1860-1914 p. 93-4.

16. ibid, p. 131, 175-6.

17. J.A.C. Baker, op cit p. 33-4, 64.

18. E. Hopkins, op cit p. 276. A.J. Taylor also dates the foundation of the Old Hill Miners Association incorrectly, in Victoria County History of Stafford Volume Two p. 106.

notes to pages 484-489

19. E. Hopkins, op cit p. 280.

20. ibid, p. 284.

21. G.J. Barnsby, Social Conditions in the Black Country in the Nineteenth Century p. 67.

22. ibid, p. 64.

23. ibid, p. 57.

24. ibid, p. 68-9.

25. Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History No. 26 Spring 1973 p. 78-9.

26. J.M. Winter & D.M. Joslin (ed) R.H. Tawney's Commonplace Book (1972) p. 42-3. By a strange coincidence a somewhat extended version of this passage is quoted in Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History No.27 Autumn 1973 on the opposite page to a letter from Dr. Barnsby in which he, in effect, concedes the point (p.36-7 of the Bulletin). In his letter Dr. Barnsby implies that it is the prime duty of labour historians to correct 'the biased misrepresentations of history' produced by bourgeois historians using bourgeois sources. Anyone entering any field of study with predilections of this kind will certainly find what he is seeking and simply produce an account which is biased in another direction. If an enquiry produces corrections to the received account these should, indeed must, be pointed out but to conduct investigations with this purpose specifically in mind is quite another thing.

The main point of Dr. Barnsby's letter is, however, to insist that working class history can only be written from working class sources, namely 'where organised class conscious workers speak for themselves through their newspapers or by their own evidence at bourgeois enquiries,' and we may also, in passing, dispose of this claim by making three points. First, it rests on a rather naive confusion between a source and a record. While the only surviving record of trade union report may be in a bourgeois newspaper the source remains the report. Most of the references to newspapers contained in this thesis are of this kind. Second, working class newspapers also had partisan viewpoints which have to be 'weighed' just as carefully as those of bourgeois newspapers. In this connection we need only refer Dr. Barnsby to the paper by Stephen Coltham, From British Miner to Commonwealth:

A Working Class Newspaper of the 1860s.

Third, it would be quite impossible to write a connected account of any aspect of working class activity, certainly in the Black Country during the nineteenth century, without drawing heavily on the local press. For many organisations their records are all that remain.

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A P P E N D I C E S

APPENDIX ONE

MIDLAND IRON AND STEEL WAGES BOARD RULES 1905

Functions of Board.

Object. - The objects of the Board shall be to discuss, and, if necessary, to arbitrate on wages or any other matter affecting the respective interest of the employers or operatives, and by conciliatory means to interpose its influence to prevent disputes and put an end to any that may arise.

Constitution.

Representation. - The Board shall consist of one employer and one operative representative from each works joining the Board - including the works attached to the Welsh Committee. Where two or more works belong to the same proprietors, each works may claim to be represented on the Board.

Employers' Representatives. - The employers shall be entitled to send one duly accredited representative from each works to each meeting of the Board.

Workpeople's Representatives. - The operatives of each works shall elect a representative by ballot, at a meeting to be held for the purpose, on such a day or days as the Standing Committee may fix, in the month of December in each year, the name of such representative, and of the works he represents, being given in to the Secretaries, on or before the 1st January next ensuing.

The Secretaries shall, in the month of November in each year, issue a notice to each works connected with the Board, requesting the election of representatives in the month of December, and shall supply the requisite forms.

Vacancies. - If any operative representative die, or resign, or cease to be qualified by terminating his connection with the works he represents, a successor shall be chosen within one month, in the same manner as is provided in the case of annual elections.

The operatives' representatives so chosen shall continue in office for the calendar year immediately following their election, and shall be eligible for re-election.

Disqualification. - Should it be proved to the satisfaction of the Standing Committee that any Member of the Board has used his influence in endeavouring to prevent the decisions of the Board of Standing Committee from being carried out, he shall forthwith cease to be a representative, and shall be liable to forfeit any fees which might otherwise be due to him from the Board.

New Admissions. - If the employers and operatives at any works not connected with the Board should desire to join the same, such desire shall be notified to the Secretaries, and by them to the Standing Committee, who shall be power to admit them to membership on being satisfied that these rules have been or are about to be complied with.

President. - The President shall be a person of position not connected with the Iron Trade, chosen by the Board, whose duty it shall be to attend at Special Meetings, upon being requested by the Board to do so. He shall take no part in the discussions, beyond asking for an explanation for the guidance of his own judgement, and if no settlement can be made, he shall give his adjudication.

Chairman, &c. - The Chairman shall be appointed by the employers' section from among their body. The Vice-Chairman shall be appointed by the operatives' section from among their body. A Secretary shall be appointed by the employers, and a Secretary shall be appointed by the operatives; and a Treasurer and a Professional Auditor shall be appointed by the Board. Either of the Secretaries, the Treasurer, or the Auditor may be dismissed by a resolution of the respective bodies appointing them, subject to three months' notice.

Duties of Officers.

Secretaries. - The Board shall meet for the transaction of business in February of each year; but, by order of the Standing Committee, the Secretaries shall convene a Meeting of the Board at any time. The circular calling such Meeting shall express, in general terms, the nature of the business for consideration.

Chairman. - The Chairman shall preside over all Meetings of the Board, and of the Standing Committee, except in

cases that require the President. In the absence of the Chairman, a temporary Chairman shall be elected by the Meeting.

Procedure.

Appointment of Standing Committee. - At the Annual Meeting of the Board, a Standing Committee shall be appointed as follows:- The employers shall nominate 13 of their number, exclusive of the Chairman, and the operatives 13 of their number, exclusive of the Vice-Chairman; of these, one employer and one operative shall be nominated by the members of the Welsh Committee.

If at a Meeting of the Board or Standing Committee any employers' representative, or any operatives' representative, be absent, the employers' Secretary, or the operatives' Secretary, shall vote for such absent member or members as the case may be.

The Standing Committee shall have power to fill up all vacancies in their own Committee that may arise during the year.

Meetings of Standing Committee. - The Standing Committee shall meet for the transaction of business prior to the yearly meeting, and in addition as often as business requires. The time and place of meeting shall be arranged by the Secretaries in default of any special direction.

Submission of Cases. - All questions requring investigation shall be submitted to the Standing Committee in writing, and shall be supplemented by such verbal evidence or

explanation as they may think needful. The complaint shall be considered as officially before the Board from the date of receiving the case.

Reference to Standing Committee. - Failing agreement between the employers' and operatives' representatives according to the instructions, all questions shall be referred to the Standing Committee, who shall investigate and have power to settle all matters so referred to it, except the selection of a President, which shall be referred to a special meeting of the full Board.

In case the Standing Committee fails to agree, the question in dispute shall be submitted to the President, whose decision shall be binding on both parties, but in all cases witnesses from the works affected may be summoned to attend and give evidence before the President in support of their case.

General Wages Questions. - When the question is one of a general rise or fall of wages, a Meeting of the Standing Committee shall be held, who may call the whole Board together if necessary, and in case no agreement can be arrived at, it shall be referred to the President, whose decision shall be final and binding on all parties.

Notice of Discussion required. - No case which the Standing Committee is called upon to deal with, or subject of dispute, shall be brought forward at any Meeting unless notice thereof has been given to the Secretaries seven clear days before such Meeting, but this is not to apply

to routine business or to matters the investigation of which may be considered necessary by the Standing Committee.

Voting. - All votes shall be taken at the Board and Standing Committee by show of hands, unless any member calls for a ballot.

Decisions Binding. - Each representative shall be deemed fully authorized to act for the works which he represents, and the decision of a majority of the Board - or in case of equality of votes, of its Chairman - shall be binding upon the employers and operatives of all works connected with the Board.

No Suspension of Work. - No suspension of work shall take place pending the decision of the Board or the President. Neither shall employers or operatives refuse to submit any case of dispute to the Board (in accordance with the Rules, Instructions and Resolutions of the Board) upon which either party may be desirous of the Board's ruling.

Revision of Rules.

Alterations. - No alteration or addition shall be made to these rules except at the Meeting of the Board to be held in February in each year, and unless notice in writing of the proposed alteration be given to the Secretaries at least one calendar month before such Meeting. The notice convening the Annual Meeting shall state fully the nature of any alteration that may be proposed.

Bye-Laws. - The Standing Committee shall have power to

make from time to time such Bye-Laws as they may consider necessary, provided the same are not inconsistent with or at variance with these Rules.

Finance.

Contributions. - The expenses incurred by the Board shall be borne equally by the employers and operatives, and it shall be the duty of the Standing Committee to establish the most convenient arrangements for collecting what may be needed to meet such expenses.

The employers' contribution shall be a sum equal to the aggregate sum paid by the operatives at each of the works.

The Standing Committee may vary the rate of contribution from time to time if needful.

The Banking Account of the Board shall be kept in the name of the Treasurer, and all Accounts shall be paid by cheque signed by him.

Payment for Attendance and Travelling. - The sum of ten shillings shall be paid to each Member of the Board, both employers and operatives, for each day's attendance, and second-class railway fare both ways.

Payment to Operatives for Time Lost. - The operatives' representative shall be paid for time necessarily lost in attending to difficulties at the works to which he belongs, upon a certificate signed by the Vice-Chairman and the operatives' Secretary, at the rate of ten shillings for each shift so lost.

Instructions.

First action of Operative. - If any subscriber to the Board desires to have its assistance in redressing any grievance, he must explain the matter to the operatives' representative of the works at which he is employed. Before doing so he must, however, have done his best to get his grievance righted by seeing his foreman, or the manager, himself.

First action of Operatives' Representative. - The operatives' representative must question the complainant about the matter, and discourage complaints which do not appear to be well founded. Before taking action, he must ascertain that the previous instruction has been complied with.

Laying Grievance before Head of Works. - If there seem to be good grounds for complaint, the complainant and the operatives' representative must take a suitable opportuniy of laying the matter before the foreman or works manager, or head of the concern (according to what may be the custom of the particular works). Except in case of emergency, these complaints shall be made only upon one day in each week, the said day and time being fixed by the manager of the works.

Statement of Complaint. - The complaint should be stated in a way that implies an expectation that it will be fairly and fully considered, and that what is right will be done. In most cases this will lead to a settlement without the matter having to go further.

Reference to Standing Committee. - If a settlement under Instructions (1,2,3,4) cannot be concluded, the works representatives and the disputents shall meet the Management to discuss the question in dispute, and endeavour to arrive at a decision. Failing this, the matter shall be brought before the Standing Committee, as per Rule 16(i.e., Procedure-Reference to Standing Committee).

If, however, an agreement cannot be come to, a statement of the points in difference shall be drawn out signed by the employer's representative and the operatives' representative, and forwarded to the Secretaries of the Board with a request that the Standing Committee will consider the matter. An official form, on which complaints may be stated, can be obtained from the Secretaries.

Meeting of Standing Committee. - It will be the duty of the standing Committee to meet for this purpose as soon after the expiration of seven days from receipt of the notice as can be arranged, but not later than the first Thursday in each month.

Delays in settling. - It is not, however, always possible to avoid some delay, and the complainant must not suppose that he will necessarily lose anything by having to wait, as any recommendation of the Standing Committee, or any decision of the Board, may be made to date back to the time of the complaint being sent in.

No Suspension of Work. - Above all, the Board would impress upon its subscribers that there must be no strike

or suspension of work. The main object of the Board is to prevent anything of this sort, and if any strike or suspension of work take place the Board will refuse to enquire into the matter in dispute till work is resumed; and the fact of its having been interrupted will be taken into account in considering the question.

Notice to be given.- It is recommended that any changes in the modes of working requiring alterations in the hours of labour or a revision of the scale of payments, shall be made a matter of notice and, as far as possible, of arrangement beforehand, so as to avoid needless subsequent disputes as to what ought to be paid.

Revision of Rules for Altered or New Conditions. - Having in view the altered conditions of rolling steel, the employers and operatives may negotiate basis rates of wages to be paid for rolling, heating, and finishing steel of all kinds. And where new conditions of work arise, and improvements are effected, the employers and operatives may arrange reasonable revision of rates, and failing agreement, the question shall be submitted to the Standing Committee, whose decision shall be binding.

APPENDIX TWO

COAL PRICES AND MINERS' WAGES IN SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE AND EAST WORCESTERSHIRE 1864 - 1914

	Selling Price of Furnace Coal (Per Ton) s.	d.	Thick Coal Miners' Wages (Per Day) s.	d.	Thin Coal Miners' Wages (Per Day) s.	d.
1864 July 18	11	0	4	6	3	3
1868 May 25	10	0	4	0	2	9
1869 Nov. 17	9	3	4	6	3	0
1871 Oct. 13	10	3	5	0	3	6
1872 Jan. 8	Miners began to work only from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Mondays and Saturdays, and from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the other four days.					
1872 Mar. 18	Miners began to work nine hours per day.					
1872 July 1	Miners began to work eight hours per day.					
1873 Feb. 18	17	0	5	6	4	0
1873 Mar. 4	19	0	5	6	4	0
1874 Mar. 11	16	0	5	6	4	0
1874 Mar. 28	Employers claimed 1/- per day wage reductions Men resisted and 16 week strike ensued, ending in favour of owners.					
1874 July 16	16	0	4	6	3	3
1874 July 24	Sliding scale established with minimum wage of 3/6 per day (thick coal). Terminable by either side at six months notice.					
1874 Oct. 5	13	0	4	0	3	0
1875 June 17	11	0	3	6	2	9
1875 Nov. 1	13	0	4	0	3	0
1876 May 1	11	0	3	6	2	9
1877 Mar. 7	Employers gave six months notice to alter basis of sliding scale. Minimum wage taken out.					
1877 Nov. 1	9	0	3	0	2	6
1879 May 5	8	0	2	9	2	4½
1879 Nov. 1	9	0	3	0	2	6

			s.	d.	s.	d.	s.	d.
1879	Dec.	1	10	0	3	3	2	7½
1880	Jan.	1	11	0	3	6	2	9
1880	April	1	10	0	3	3	2	7½
1880	June	1	9	0	3	0	2	6
1881	Feb.	1	10	0	3	0	2	7½
1881	April	1	9	0	3	0	2	6
1881	Oct.	1	10	0	3	3	2	7½
1881	Nov.	21	Miners gave three months notice to alter basis of sliding scale.					
1882	Jan.	1	Sliding scale altered from wages movement of threepence to the shilling to movement of fourpence to the shilling (thick coal).					
			10	0	3	4	2	8
1882	Oct.	8	11	0	3	8	2	10
1883	May	1	10	0	3	8	2	10
1883	May	2	Employers gave three months notice to terminate sliding scale.					
1883	Aug.	13	Wages Board formed. When no agreement could be reached on wages basis matter submitted to arbitration. On 4 June 1884 arbitrator awarded reduction of 4d per day for thick coal men with thin coal men in proportion, effective from 14 June to 27 September 1884. Men objected to award on ground that arbitrator gave no explanation.					
1884	June	14	Employers gave 14 days notice to implement reduction of 4d per day. Strike ensued, lasting 16 weeks and ending in favour of owners. For next four years owners refused to meet in conference with men.					
1884	Nov.	1	9	6	3	4	2	8
1885	Nov.	1	10	0	3	4	2	8
1886	Nov.	1	10	6	3	4	2	8
1887	Nov.	1	9	6	3	4	2	8
1888	Oct.	4	Wages Board re-formed to administer new sliding scale with minimum wage of 3/4d per day. Wages movement of 1d per day (thick coal) to 2d per ton in selling price of coal. Changes based on					

			average selling prices of 12 selected firms, six chosen by each side.					
1889	Mar.	8		5	6	3	8	2 11
1889	Mar.	8	Resolution of Wages Board that thin coal miners' wages advance 3d per day to thick coal miners' 4d per day.					
1889	Mar.	24		5	9	3	10	3 0½
1889	Sept.	30		6	0	4	0	3 2
1889	Dec.	30		6	7	4	4	3 5
1890	Apr.	15		7	6	4	8	3 8
1893	July	18		6	0	4	8	3 8
1893	Dec.	30		7	0	4	8	3 8
1893	Dec.	30	Three months notice by men to alter sliding scale					
1894	Apr.	30	Amended scale adopted. Wages movement of 1d per day (thick coal) to 1½d per ton in selling price.					
1894	Aug.	29		5	10	4	4	3 5
1898	Oct.		2½% wage advance, making wages:					
						4	5	3 5¾
1899	Feb.	13	Resolution of Wages Board that wages be advanced by 2d per day (thick coal) and 1½d per day (thin coal), representing 5% advance on the standard rate of 3/4d per day, commencing from first making up day in April; and that a further advance of 1d and ¾d per day, representing 2½% on the standard rate, be paid from first making up day in October					
1899	Apr.					4	7	3 7½
1899	Oct.					4	8	3 8
			Resolution to abandon sliding scale and reform Wages Board as Wages and Conciliation Board, and to advance wages by 5% from 1 January 1900.					
1900	Jan.	1				4	10	3 6½
			Resolution that wages be advanced 5% on 1888 standard rate on 1 October, and that there be two further 5% advances on that rate on					

		1 January 1901 and 1 February 1901. Wages now ruled by decision of the Conciliation Board.				
			s.	d.	s.	d.
1900	Oct.	1	5	0	3	11
1901	Jan.	1	5	2	4	0½
1901	Feb.	1	5	4	4	2
1902	July	1	5	0	3	11
1904	Jan.	1	4	10	3	9½
1904	Aug.	19	4	8	3	8
1907	May		4	10	3	9½
1907	June		5	0	3	11
1907	Oct.		5	2	4	0½
1908	Jan.		5	4	4	2
1908	Sept.		5	2	4	0½
1909	Mar.		5	0	3	11
1911		Wages set at minimum of 50% above 1888 standard rate.				
1912	Mar.	Strike lasting five weeks. Minimum Wage Act passed.				
1912	Oct.	Wage advance of 5%, making 55% above 1888 standard.				
			5	2	4	0½
1913	Jan.	Wage advance of 5% making 60% above 1888 standard				
			5	4	4	2½
1913	May	Wage advance of 5% making 65% above 1888 standard.				
			5	6	4	4½

APPENDIX THREE

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE AND EAST WORCESTERSHIRE MINERS' MINIMUM WAGE BOARD: AWARD OF THE CHAIRMAN MAY 1912

Having heard the parties and having given, in accordance with the provisions of the Act, a casting vote where required by reason of difference between the two classes of members, do hereby record award, and settle the said minimum rates of colliers, and append the district rules on the clear undertaking given by both parties on the Joint District Board, and neither these rates nor these rules are to interfere with old local customs, and that these rates are not to involve the reduction of the present wages rate of any of the classes hereinafter mentioned, and with this proviso that the schedule of minimum wages does not apply to anyone over the age of 17 years until he has been employed underground for two years.

GENERAL MINIMUM RATES OF WAGES.

(1) Boys (14 to 17) 1s. 10d. per day.
" (17 to 18) 2s. 8d. " "
" (18 to 21) 3s. 0d. " "

Four shillings per day shall be paid to all men over 21 who are employed underground in winding and transmitting coal to the surface, other than pikemen, loaders, fillers, horse fettlers, and stable cleaners.

Horse fettlers and stable cleaners over 21 years shall be paid 2s. per day.

(2) Workmen (thick coal) (a) per ton work or stint. When a pikeman works piecework, ton work, or stint work in thick coal the minimum wage shall be 50 per cent, above the 1888 standard of 3s. 4d. per nominal day. On request he shall be stinted or measured on not less than 1¼ days' stint, and if he fails to do this amount of work he shall only be paid for what he has done, unless he proves that his place is abnormal. Notwithstanding the words "if he fails to do the amount of work he cannot be paid less than the minimum, that is 50 per cent above the 1888 standard of 3s. 4d. per nominal day."

(b) For day work.

1. Pickers-inincharge, 6s. 6d.

2. Pikemen, 6s. 2d.

3. Assistant pikemen, 5s. 8d.

4. Roadmen and repairers, 5s. 4d.

5. Loaders and fillers, 5s.

(3) Workmen in thin coal (a) for piecework, ton work, or stint work. When a pikeman works piecework, ton work, or stint work in thin mine the minimum wage shall be 50 per cent above the 1888 standard of 2s. 8d. per nominal day in the Dudley area, and 2s. 5d. per nominal day in the Wolverhampton district. He shall, on request, be measured on not less than 1½ days stints; and if he fails to do this amount of work he shall be paid for what he has done, unless he proves that his place is abnormal, notwithstanding the words "if he fails to do this amount

of work he cannot be paid less than the minimum, that is 50 per cent above the 1888 standard of 2s. 8d. per nominal day in the Dudley area and 2s. 5d. per nominal day in the Wolverhampton district."

For day work:-

1. Pikemen, 5s. 11d. Dudley area; 5s. 8d. Wolverhampton district.
2. Brushers and broomers, 5s. 11d. Dudley; 5s. 8d. Wolverhampton.
3. Loaders, 4s. 9d. Dudley; 4s. 9d. Wolverhampton.

Workmen in seams of stratified ironstone:-

1. Ironstone men 5s. 11d. per day.

The rules under which this award has been given are as follows:-

1. On condition of being entitled to a minimum wage the miner's work shall be efficient, and he shall perform the customary amount of work or stint averaged over a period of four weeks, as is usual or agreed upon at the particular colliery or seam at which the workman is for the time engaged, unless he is able to satisfy the management that such failure is due to no fault of his own.

2. There shall be prepared and kept at each colliery office or sub-office a list containing the names of workmen excluded from the right to the minimum wage by reason of their being aged or infirm, or partially disabled by illness or accident.

3. In any case where a coal getter fails during four consecutive weeks to send out such a quantity of coal as calculated at the tonnage and other rates paid in the seam shall amount to the minimum payable to him during such period, the minimum wage shall be paid at the end of such period. But if he is unable to satisfy the management before the end of the fifth week, if the matter is disputed (reasonable facilities being given him for the purpose) that such failure is due to no fault of his own, the employer shall have the option to retain the services of such workman, paying him at the price lists rate only, or to terminate his employment. This shall be certified in accordance with Section 1 of the Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Act 1912, in a book to be kept up at each colliery office or sub-office.

4. In ascertaining the earnings of coal-getters there shall not be deducted from the gross earnings of men they employ more than the severals paid for similar men employed in the particular mine or seam.

5. In the case of two or more persons working together under a single tally or number, and dividing their joint earnings for the purposes of the minimum wage, one-half of the number only shall be considered as coal-getters.

6. If at any time it can be proved to the satisfaction of the Joint District Board that the output per man employed has diminished at any pit through the irregular

or inefficient work performed since the scheduled minimum rates were fixed, the matter shall be brought before a special meeting of the Joint District Board with a view to reducing the minimum until such time as it can be shown that the output per man has again become normal.

7. A workman who does not attend 80 per cent of the time the pit works each week, unless prevented by illness or accident or other justifiable cause, shall not be entitled to be paid the minimum wage.

8. If a workman when he presents himself for work at the pit bottom, or at the appointed station, is informed that something has happened in or about the mine to prevent his working, he shall return to the surface, and will not be entitled to claim any wage in respect of that shaft.

9. If a workman is informed at any part of the shift that for any cause he cannot continue his work, he shall only be entitled to that portion of the wage which the time at which he was at work bears to the total period of the shift.

10. In the case of any accident or breakdown in the shift which would prevent the further output of fuel in the shift, and the workman is informed of it, he shall only be entitled to the proportion of the daily minimum wage up to the time in relation to the total period of the shift when he was informed of the breakdown or accident.

11. If, from any cause, it becomes necessary to "knock off" at any hour earlier than that at which the shift would ordinarily terminate following the present practice, a workman shall only be entitled to the proportion of the wage which the time at which he was at work bears to the total period in the shift.

The machinery for settling disputes in reference to the minimum wage shall be as follows: (a) An endeavour shall be made by the workmen and colliery officials to settle the difference; (b) failing that, it shall be considered by the managers of the pit and the agent of the miners' association of the district; (c) failing a settlement by them it shall be referred to the District Board, whose decision shall be final, each party to pay their own expenses; (d) this decision shall be certified in writing, and handed to either or both of the parties when requested, and such certificate shall be conclusive evidence of the discussion.

APPENDIX FOUR.

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE BOLT AND NUT TRADE WAGES BOARD RULES 1893

Functions of Board.

Object. - The object of the Board shall be to deal from time to time with the wages paid for hand-forged work in the Bolt and Nut Trade.

Constitution.

Representation. - The Board shall consist of employers and workmen in the South Staffordshire and District Bolt and Nut Trade who sign a declaration that they will adhere to the rate of wages from time to time authorised by the Board and to the rules and regulations of the Board.

Election. - The employers and workmen shall each appoint 12 delegates, who shall represent them at the meetings of the Board.

Withdrawal. - Any member may withdraw from the Board by giving one calendar month's notice, and he shall then be no longer bound by the regulations of the Board, except as to such matters as at the time of his notice of resignation are binding on the Board for a longer period than one month.

Chairman. - The Chairman of the Board shall be elected annually from among the employers' delegates.

Secretaries. - Each section of the Wages Board shall appoint and pay its own secretary, and separate expenses, but the joint expenses of the Board shall be borne equally by the employers' and workmen's sections.

Duties of Officers.

Chairman. - The Chairman of the Board shall preside at all meetings of the Board at which he is present, and if he is absent from any meeting a chairman shall be elected from among the employers present. The Chairman's ruling on all matters of procedure shall be final.

Secretaries. - If at any time the general body of employers or of the workmen, or any three members of either section of the Board, wish to call a meeting of the Board to consider any special matter, they shall, through their secretary, notify to the secretary of the other section of the Board their wish to hold a special meeting of the Board, at the same time stating the nature of the special business they wish to deal with. The secretaries shall then arrange for a meeting at a convenient date, and shall specify in the notices to the delegates calling the meeting the nature of the special business to be dealt with.

Procedure.

Meetings. - Four times at least in every year a meeting of the employers' and workmen's delegates shall be held to transact the general business of the Board.

Notice of Meetings. - Fourteen days' notice shall be given of any Meeting of the Board.

Notice of Change in Wages. - One month's notice of any change in the rate of wages shall be given either by employers or workmen.

Quorum. - Four employers' delegates and four workmen's delegates shall form a quorum.

Voting. - No resolution of the Board shall be deemed to be carried unless it is approved both by a majority of employers' delegates, and by a majority of workmen's delegates present at a meeting, and voting shall be by show of hands.

Reference to Arbitration. - In case the Board is unable to settle any matter brought before it, not less than three-fourths of the employers, or not less than three-fourths of the workmen present at the meeting may claim to have the matter referred to arbitration, and the Board shall nominate an arbitrator, but if the Board cannot agree on an arbitrator, then the Mayor for the time being of the City of Birmingham shall be requested to nominate one, and his choice shall be binding on the whole Board.

Decisions Binding. - The decision of the arbitrator shall be binding on the whole Board.

Revision of Rules.

Alterations. - No alteration shall be made in these rules except at a general meeting of the Board, and notice of any proposed alteration shall be given in the circular calling the meeting.

Finance.

Guarantee Fund. - The sum of £199 6s. 5d. at present standing to the credit of the Board at the London and Midland Bank shall constitute a guarantee fund of the Board, which shall remain on deposit at the Bank or be invested in such other manner as the Board may from time to time determine. Any further contributions to the

guarantee fund resolved upon by the Board shall be paid one-half by the employers and one-half by the workmen.

Application of Guarantee Fund. - The guarantee fund shall be applied by the Board in such manner as it thinks fit for the purpose of carrying out its arrangements, and in any case where any member or members refuse to carry out the arrangements of the Board, the fund shall be applied in supporting the masters or workmen as the case may be.

The Bottom Dog's Fighting for Betterment.

Central Headquarters: WHITE HORSE HOTEL, LOWER HIGH STREET, WEDNESBURY.

FELLOW WORKERS,

Some months ago the Unions concerned with the organisation of Labour in the Metal and Tube Trades, and semi and unskilled workers in the Engineering and Allied Trades, together with the Trades Councils within the area of Birmingham and South Staffordshire, decided to institute a Minimum Wages Movement for Men and Women.

This great work is well under way, and the bottom dog is aroused. 18/- a week is doomed, and the minimum wage demanded is 25/- for adult male labour, with 2/- per week advance for all over this rate; 12/- for adult females; and 20 per cent. for pieceworkers on present piece prices; while a scale according to age is fixed for youths and girls.

The Youths' rates to be as follows:

14 years of age	....	7/- per week.
15 " "	....	9/- "
16 " "	....	11/- "
17 " "	....	13/- "
18 " "	....	15/- "
19 " "	....	17/6 "
20 " "	....	20/- "
21 " "	....	23/- "

The Girls' rates to be:

14 years of age	....	6/6 per week
15 " "	....	7/- "
16 " "	....	7/6 "
17 " "	....	8/6 "
18 " "	....	9/6 "
19 to 21	....	10/6 "
After 21	....	12/- "

Many thousands have already won these rates, and at the present time 30,000 men are out on strike for the same object, and the time has come for a united demand to be made to the employers. Every firm in the whole district will receive a circular within the next few days, setting forth the nature of the demand.

Men who are working under bad conditions are asked to report or send a postcard to the following headquarters:—

Birmingham	Workers' Union Offices, 246, Corporation Street.
	Amal. Gasworkers' Offices, Ruskin Chambers, Corporation St.
	N.U. Gasworkers, 180, Corporation Street.
Wolverhampton ...	Labour Assembly Room, 35, Queen Square.
Bilston	13, High Street.
Wednesbury	"Why Not" Inn, New Street.
Walsall	Newport Arms, Pleck Road.
West Bromwich	3, Pearson Street.
Darlaston	Richmond Villa, Walsall Road.

Signed, on behalf of Central Strike Council,

JOHN BEARD, *Chairman.*
H. SIMPSON, *Vice-Chairman.*
JOSEPH KESTERTON, *Secretary.*
J. WHITTAKER, J.P., *Treasurer.*

This circular does not apply to employees working for firms who have conceded Union terms as under:—

Birmingham Small Arms	Braithwaite and Kirk.
Rudge-Whitworth, Ltd.	Archibald Kenrick and Sons, Ltd.
John Wright and Eagle Range Ltd.	George Salter and Co., Ltd.
Armstrong Triplex Three-speed Gear, Ltd.	London Screw Company.
New Hudson Co., Ltd.	Hackett and Sons.
Metropolitan Carriage Works.	E. Danks and Co., Ltd.
Oldbury Carriage Works.	Phœnix Screw Co.
Tangye's.	Lones, Vernon and Holden.
Guest, Keen, and Nettlefold, Ltd., St. George's Works.	Wolseley Tool and Motor Co., Ltd.
	Siddaway and Co.
Weldless Steel Tube, Ltd.	Chance Brothers.
United Hinges, Ltd.	Muntz's Metal Co.

Messrs. Cadbury pay a minimum of 26s. a week.

May 1913

APPENDIX SIX

AGREEMENT BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND UNIONS JULY 1913

THE AGREEMENT made this seventh day of July, 1913, between the Midland Employers' Federation (hereinafter called "The Federation") on the one part, and the Workers' Union, the National Union of Gas Workers and the Amalgamated Gas Workers', Brickmakers' and General Labourers' Union on the other part (hereinafter called the Trade Unions).

1. That work shall be resumed forthwith.

2. Day rates that the Federation will recommend shall be outlined to its members. The following standard rates of wages for ablebodied unskilled labourers working for not less than a full working week to be established and paid during the term of this agreement, namely:-

   (a) 23/- a week for the Birmingham District, which includes Birmingham, Smethwick and Oldbury.

   (b) 22/- per week for the Black Country during the period of six months after the date of resumption of work, and thereafter the standard wage of the Black Country to be increased to 23/- per week.

3. Women, girls and youths to be paid the rates set forth in Schedule A below.

   (a) The price for piece work shall be fixed by mutual arrangement between employer and worker who performs the work.

(b) Each workman's day rate to be guaranteed irrespective of his piecework earnings.

(c) No general advance in piecework can be conceded, nor can any general advances in day rates be agreed to other than those agreed to in clause 2 during the period of this agreement, it being understood that the word "general" will not be taken to imply that applications from sections of men are to be debarred from consideration by the employer.

Failing agreement the matter becomes a dispute to be dealt with as herein provided :

5. Provisions for Avoiding Disputes.

With a view to avoiding disputes, deputations of workmen shall be received by their employers by appointment for mutual discussion of any question of any question in the settlement of which both parties are directly concerned, or it shall be competent for an official of any trade union to approach the secretary of the trade committee of the Federation involved, or vice versa, with regard to any such question, and failing settlement it shall be competent for either party to bring the question before a conference to be held between the federation and the trade unions. In the event of the federation or trade union desiring to raise any question, a conference for this purpose may be arranged by application to the secretary of the Federation of of the Trade Unions as the case may be. Conferences shall be held within

twelve working days from the receipt of the application by the secretary of the Federation or of the Trade Union concerned. There shall be no stoppage of work either of a partial or a general character, but work shall proceed under the current conditions until the procedure provided for above has been carried through.

Note. To be amended in agreement with the Engineering Employers' Federation.

6. The existing Agreement as specified in Schedule B hereto shall be observed and performed by the parties thereto. Subject thereto this Agreement shall be binding on all the present and future members of the Federation and Trade Unions.

BREACHES OF AGREEMENT.

7. This Agreement is entered into on the understanding (which the Federation are informed to be the case) that the rules of the various Unions involved efficiently deal with breaches of agreement by their members and that the rules in such cases will be enforced.

8. No notices to stop or suspend work to be given in on account of any dispute in any works outside the membership of the Federation.

The trade unions agree to abstain from giving notice for the workmen in the employ of the federation in the case of an outside dispute, and the federation will not support any firms who are not members of the federation.

9. This agreement shall remain in force for a period of at least 12 months from the signing of this agreement, and within 14 days at the end of the term of this agreement, notice to terminate will be given by either party. Work, however, shall not be suspended pending any negotiations which may be proceeding. Should the negotiations fall through, work shall not be stopped until seven days from the termination of such negotiations.

10. As soon as possible all men shall be reinstated to their positions and no workman shall be jeopardised because of any official position with a trade union. The parties hereunto agree to recognise the adoption of the foregoing to their respective members.

SIGNED on behalf of
Midland Employers'
Federation.
T. Horace Spencer, Chairman.

SIGNED on behalf of the
National Union of Gas Workeers.
J. Firth.

SIGNED on behalf of the
Amalgamated Gas Workers,
Brickmakers' and General
Labourers' Union.
H. Simpson.

SIGNED on behalf of the
Workers' Union
Julia Varley.
Jack Beard.

S C H E D U L E A.

Age	Youths	Girls
14	7/-	6/-
15	9/-	6/6
16	11/-	7/-
17	13/-	8/-
18	15/-	9/-
19	17/-	10/-
20	19/-	11/-
21	-	12/-

S C H E D U L E B.

The agreements specified in Schedule B of the agreement concern those between the Metropolitan Carriage, Waggon and Finance Co. Ltd., and the Engineers and Allied Trades Societies Federation and the Engineering Employers Federation and the same.

APPENDIX SEVEN

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION RESULTS IN BLACK COUNTRY CONSTITUENCIES 1865-1910

A. 1865 -1880

	Dudley	Walsall	Wednesbury	Wolverhampton (Two Members)
1865	Sheridan, H. B. (L) 526 Truscott, F. W. (C) 275	Forster, C. (L)		Villiers, Rt.Hon. C.P.(L) 1623 Weguelin, T. M. (L) 1519 Thorneycroft, T. 47
1868	Sheridan, H.B. (L)	Forster, C. (L)	Brogden, A.(L) 6129 Walker, T.E.(C) 3779 Kenealy,D.R.E. (L) 969	Villiers,RT.Hon. C.P.(L) Weguelin,T.M.(L)
1874	Sheridan, H.B. (L) 5149 Shenstone,F.Smith (LC) 4181 Election Declared Void Re-Election Sheridan, H.B. (L) 5607 Hingley,N. (C) 4889	Forster,Sir C. (L) 3364 Bell,Maj.W.M.(C) 1721	Brogden, A.(L) 7530 Mills, R. (C) 5830	Villiers,Rt.Hon. C.P.(L)10358 Weguelin,T.M.(L) 10036 Williams, W. (C) 3628
1880	Sheridan, H.B. (L) 6948 Waterman, A.(C) 4163	Forster,Sir C. (L)	Brogden,A.(L) 6912 Isaacson,F.W.(C) Retired 207	Villiers,Rt.Hon. C.P.(L)12197 Fowler,H.H. (L) 11609 Hickman,A. (L) 5874

B. 1885 - 1910

	Kingswinford	Worcestershire North	Dudley
1885	Hill, A.S. (C) 5161 Harrison,G.K.(L) 4530	Hingley, B. (L) 5774 Willis-Bund,J.W.(C) 2157	Sheridan, H.B.(L)6377 Robinson, B. (C) 5211
1886	Hill, A.S. (C)	Hingley, B. (LU)	Robinson, B. (C) 6475 Sheridan, H.B.(GL)4545
1892	Hill, A.S. (C) 5371 Parker, T. (GL) 3800	Hingley, B. (GL) 5329 Bridgeman, W.C. (C)3171	Robinson, B. (C) 6668 Spensley, H.(GL) 5619
1895	Hill, A.S. (C)	Wilson, J.W. (LU) 5012 Waite, R. (GL) 4024	Robinson, B. (C) 6536 Fleming, C.J.(GL) 5795
1900	Webb, W.G. (C) On dec. of Webb	Wilson, J.W. (LU)	Robinson, B. (C) 6461 Belcher, W. (L) 5876
1905	Hill, A.S. (C) 5490 Dunne, E.M.(L) 4887		
1906	Hill, A.S. (C) 6311 Guest,F.E. (L) 5470	Wilson, J.W. (L) 6908 Campion,W.R. (LU) 6429	Hooper, A.G. (L) 8296 Claughton,G.H.(C)7542
1910 (Jan.)	Hill, A.S. (U) 7267 Coysh, F. (L) 5226	Wilson, J.W. (L) 8272 Campion,W.R. (U) 7953	Hooper, A.G. (L) 8342 Griffith-Boscawen,E.C. (U) 8155
1910 (Dec.)	Hill, A.S. (U)	Wilson, J.W. (L) 7894 Timins, D. (U) 7625	Griffith-Boscawen,E.C. (U) 8260 Hooper, A.G. (L) 7900

	Walsall	Wednesbury	West Bromwich
1885	Forster,Sir C. (L) 5112 James, F. (C) 3435	Lloyd, W. (C) 4628 Stanhope,P.J.(L) 4433	Blades, J.H. (L) 3988 Spencer,J.E. (C) 3171
1886	Forster, Sir C. (GL) On dec. of Forster	Stanhope,P.J.(GL)4883 Lloyd, W. (C) 4221	Spencer,J.E. (C) 3660 Moore, J.T. (GL) 3090
1891	Holden, E.T.(GL)4899 James, F. (C) 4360		
1892	James, F. (C) 5226 Holden,E.T. (GL)4989 James unseated on petition	Lloyd, W. (C) 4986 Stanhope,P.J.(GL)4926	Spencer,J.E. (C) 4474 Roberts,T.L.(GL) 3429
1893	Hayter,Sir A.D. (GL) 5235 Ritchie,C.T.(C) 5156		
1895	Gedge, S. (C) 5145 Hayter, Sir A.D. (L) 4828	Green, W.D. (C) 4924 Roberts,C.H.(GL) 4733	Spencer, J.E. (C)
1900	Hayter, Sir A.D. (L) 5610 Gedge, S. (C) 5285	Green, W.D. (C) 4733 Horton, E. (L) 4558	Spencer, J.E. (C)
1906	Dunne, E.M. (L) 7092 Bagshawe, B.(C) 5893	Hyde, C.G. (L) 6150 Bird, A.F. (C) 5206	Hazel, A.E.W.(L) 5475 Lewisham, Viscount (C) 4259
1910 (Jan.)	Cooper, R.A. (U)7290 Dunne, E.M. (L)6745	Griffiths,J.N.(U)6636 Hyde, C.G. (L) 6040	Lewisham, Viscount (U) 5672 Hazel, A.E.W.(L) 4937
1910 (Dec.)	Cooper, R.A. (U)7174 Morgan, J. (L) 6385	Griffiths,J.N.(U)6423 Baker, H. A. (L) 5691	Lewisham, Viscount (U) 5046 Hazel, A.E.W.(L) 5041

	Wolverhampton East	Wolverhampton South	Wolverhampton West
1885	Fowler, H.H. (L)3935 Bird, W. (C) 2648	Villiers,C.P.(L)	Hickman, A. (C) 3722 Plowden,W.C.(L) 3569
1886	Fowler,H.H.(GL) 3752 Underhill,J.(C) 2629	Villiers,C.P.(LU)	Plowden,Sir W.C. (GL) 3706 Hickman,Sir.A.(C)3583
1892	Fowler, H.H.(GL)	Villiers,C.P.(LU)	Hickman,Sir.A.(C)4772 Plowden,Sir.W.C.(GL) 3656
1895	Fowler, Sir H.H. (GL)4011 Kettle,R.E.C.(C)2977	Villiers,C.P.(LU) on dec. of Villiers	Hickman,Sir.A.(C)4770 Thorne, G.R.(GL)3947
1898		Gibbons,J.L.(LU)4115 Thorne,G.R.(GL) 4004	
1900	Fowler, Sir H.H.(L)	Norman, H. (L) 3701 Oulton, W.(LU) 3532	Hickman, Sir.A.(C)
1906	Fowler, Sir H.H. (L) 5610 Amery, L.S.(LU) 2745 Fowler created Viscount Wolverhampton	Norman, H. (L) 4823 Villiers,C.H. (LU) 4137	Richards,T.F.(Lab)5756 Hickman,Sir.A.(C) 5585
1908	Thorne, G.R.(L) 4514 Amery, L.S.(U) 4462		
1910 (Jan.)	Thorne,G.R.(L) 5276 Amery, L.S.(U) 4462	Hickman,T.E.(U) 4989 Norman,Sir.H.(L)4619	Bird, A.F. (U) 6382 Richards,T.F.(Lab)5790
1910 (Dec)	Thorne,G.R.(L) 5072 Whiteside,R.B.(U)3881	Hickman, T.E.(U)4784 Lever, A.L. (L) 4440	Bird, A.F. (U) 5925 Price, L. (L) 5631

APPENDIX EIGHT

LEADERS OF THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT IN THE BLACK COUNTRY 1863-1914

*AUCOTT, William (1830-1915) Leading figure in the Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain; president of Amalgamated Malleable Ironworkers of Great Britain and of Associated Iron and Steel Workers of Great Britain; vice-chairman of South Staffordshire Mill and Forge Wages Board; operatives' secretary of Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board; Primitive Methodist, Liberal in politics.

BAGLEY, Harry (1876-1943) Leading figure in Workers' Union in Wolverhampton district; organiser for Transport and General Workers' Union; secretary of Wolverhampton Trades Council; Labour party agent for Cannock, and for Clay Cross; member of many Joint Industrial Councils; OBE.

BARNES, Henry (—) Almost no personal details known; leading figure in West Bromwich Miners' Association from its foundation to the 1890s; operatives' secretary to South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Coal Trade Wages Board; strongly in favour of sliding scales and conciliation.

BRADFORD, William (1867-1951) Successively general financial secretary and general secretary of Flint Glass-makers' Association; member Dudley Town Council for 41 years, Mayor in 1926; J.P.; member of Trade Union Tariff Reform Association; O.B.E.; Lifelong Conservative in politics.

BREAKWELL, William (—) Almost no personal details known; successively agent to Brierley Hill Miners' Association and Old Hill Miners' Association in 1860s and 1870s; opposed to sliding scales and generally militant in attitude.

BRITTAIN, Levi (—) Almost no personal details known. Agent to Dudley Miners' Association from sometime in 1860s to its termination in 1880; member of executive council of Practical Miners; generally militant in attitude; active Liberal in politics in 1870s but later converted to Conservatism.

BROCKHOUSE, Harry (1868-1921) Pioneer of socialism in the Black Country; leading figure in West Bromwich ILP and Labour Church; member of National Administrative Council of ILP; member of West Bromwich Town Council and West Bromwich School Board.

*CAPPER, James (1829-1895) Leading figure in the Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain; operatives' secretary of South Staffordshire Mill and Forge Wages Board and of Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board. Gladstonian Liberal in politics.

DAY, Edward (—) Almost no personal details known; first secretary of Lock and Keysmiths' Union; appeared before Royal Commission on Labour 1892.

DEAKIN, Joseph (1858-1937) Pioneer of socialism in the Black Country; founder member of Walsall Socialist Club in 1887; imprisoned for five years for part in alleged "anarchists' plot" 1892; returned to Walsall after release and became leading influence in labour movement in town and surrounding district.

+DEAN, Benjamin (1839-1910) Agent of Pelsall Miners' Association; leading figure in M.F.G.B. and served six terms on its executive committee; Walsall councillor, and Mayor in 1906; J.P.; Liberal in politics; Primitive Methodist.

*DEAN, Frederick James (1868-1914) Second son of Benjamin Dean and succeeded his father as Pelsall miners' agent in 1910, though never a working miner himself; M.F.G.B. representative at TUC and Labour Party conferences; Labour convert from Liberalism in politics.

EDWARDS, Samuel (1875-1963) Agent of Old Hill Miners' Association in succession to Benjamin Winwood; member of executive committee of M.F.G.B. and delegate to international conferences; Labour in politics; Methodist; J.P.

*<u>GIBBS, Charles</u> (1843-1909) Leading figure in Associated Operative Bakers and Confectioners' Union; leading figure in West Bromwich Trades Council and its first president; ILP convert from Liberalism; member of West Bromwich School Board.

<u>GRIFFITHS, Thomas</u> (—) Almost no personal details known; agent of West Bromwich Miners' Association from sometime in 1860s until dismissed in 1880; briefly treasurer of Practical Miners; in favour of conciliation and sliding scales; unsuccessful candidate for West Bromwich School Board in 1877.

<u>HARRIS, Samuel</u> (1855-1915) Operatives' vice-chairman of Midland Iron and Steel Wages Board in succession to Thomas Piggott and held position for 29 years; strongly in favour of conciliation and sliding scales; Liberal in politics; Methodist.

+<u>JUGGINS, Richard</u> (1843-1895) Secretary of National Amalgamated Nut and Bolt Makers' Association and of Midland Counties Trades Federation; appeared before Select Committee on Sweating System 1889 and Royal Commission on Labour 1892; central figure in Black Country craft unionism; Liberal in politics; Methodist.

MANSELL, Thomas (1866-1915) General secretary of South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Miners' Association; member of executive committee of Midland Miners' Federation; member of Tipton Urban District Council and Staffordshire County Council; Liberal in politics; J.P.

MASON, James Cooksey (1887-1970) Pioneer of trade unionism among brickmakers; full time official of Birmingham Gasworkers' Union from 1913; Birmingham district secretary of National Union of General and Municipal Workers; leading figure in many Joint Industrial Councils; Labour member of Quarry Bank Urban District Council; O.B.E.

+MILLERCHIP, William (1863-1939) Secretary of Lock and Keysmiths' Union; leading figure in Walsall Co-operative Society; president of Midland Counties Trades Federation; Walsall councillor and Mayor in 1908; J.P.; first manager of Walsall Labour Exchange; awarded M.B.E. in 1927.

*PIGGOTT, Thomas (1836-1887) Leading figure in Associated Ironworkers of Great Britain and in Amalgamated Malleable Ironworkers of Great Britain; operatives' vice-chairman of South Staffordshire Mill and Forge Wages Board; Liberal in politics.

PRICE, John (—) Almost no personal details known; working nailer who acted as legal adviser to the nailers and organised most of their shortlived unions during the second half of the nineteenth century; appeared before Select Committee on the Sweating System 1889.

*RUST, Henry (1831-1902) Leading figure in West Bromwich Miners' Association from its foundation and agent from 1890; vice-chairman of South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Coal Trade Wages Board and of its successor, South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Coal Trade Conciliation Board; Gladstonian Liberal in politics; Primitive Methodist.

SANDERS, Haydn (—) Almost no personal details known; leading figure in Knights of Labour in Walsall district; member of S.D.F. and founder member of Walsall Socialist Club; member of Walsall Town Council briefly; later founder and secretary of Stovegrate Makers' Association in Rotherham district.

SHARROCKS, William (1854-1921) Midland area agent of Boilermakers' Society; member of Wolverhampton Town Council, School Board and Education Committee; member of I.L.P.

*SITCH, Charles Henry (1887-1960) Third son of Thomas Sitch; secretary of Hand-hammered Chain branch of National Federation of Women Workers; vice-chairman of Stourbridge and District Firebrick Wages and Conciliation Board; secretary of Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association of Saltney, Pontypridd and Staffordshire in succession to his father; Labour convert from Liberalism; Labour MP for Kingswinford 1918-31.

+SITCH, Thomas (1852-1923) Secretary of Chainmakers' and Strikers' Association of Saltney, Pontypridd and Staffordshire; treasurer of Midland Counties Trades Federation; member of Rowley Regis Urban District Council and its chairman in 1911; J.P.; Late convert from Liberalism to Labour in politics.

TAYLOR, John (1856-1942) Associated with Midland Counties Trades Federation throughout its existence; president from its foundation in 1886, succeeded Richard Juggins as secretary in 1895 and held position until Federation wound up in 1940; Dudley councillor; Labour convert from Liberalism in politics; J.P.

*THICKETT, Joseph (1865-1938) leading figure in Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, being member of its national executive committee in 1905, and of its successor the National Union of Railwaymen; president Walsall Trades and Labour Representation Council; first Labour member of Walsall Town Council and Mayor in 1923; Labour candidate for Walsall 1918.

+WEBB, Simeon (1864-1929) President and later general secretary of Galvanised Hollow-ware, Sheetmetal Workers and Braziers Association; general president of the National Union of Sheet Metal Workers and Braziers; member of executive council of the Midland Counties Trades Federation; member of Tipton Urban District Council; chairman of Dudley Poor Law Guardians; Primitive Methodist; Labour convert from Liberalism in politics; awarded O.B.E. in 1929.

WHITTAKER, James (1865-1940) President of Wolverhampton Trades Council; member of Wolverhampton Town Council and Mayor in 1935; agent to T.F. Richards and Alexander Walkden; J.P.; central figure in rise of Labour Party in Wolverhampton.

*WINWOOD, Benjamin (1844-1913) Agent of Old Hill Miners' Association and pioneer of M.F.G.B. in Black Country; vice-chairman of South Staffordshire and East Worcestershire Coal Trade Wages Board briefly; member of South Staffordshire Mining Compensation Fund Committee; member Hill (Halesowen) Parish Council; Liberal in politics.

±Full biography published in J.M. Bellamy & J. Saville (eds), A Dictionary of Labour Biography Volume One (1972)

*Full biography published in J.M. Bellamy & J. Saville (eds) A Dictionary of Labour Biography Volume Two (1974). All these biographies, except that of Benjamin Dean, are the work of the author of this thesis. Full biographies of other figures will be included in subsequent volumes of the Labour Dictionary.

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